



**CENTRAL REGION
WORKFORCE BOARD**

Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Four Year Plan

Fiscal Years 2026-2029

July, 2025

I. Introduction

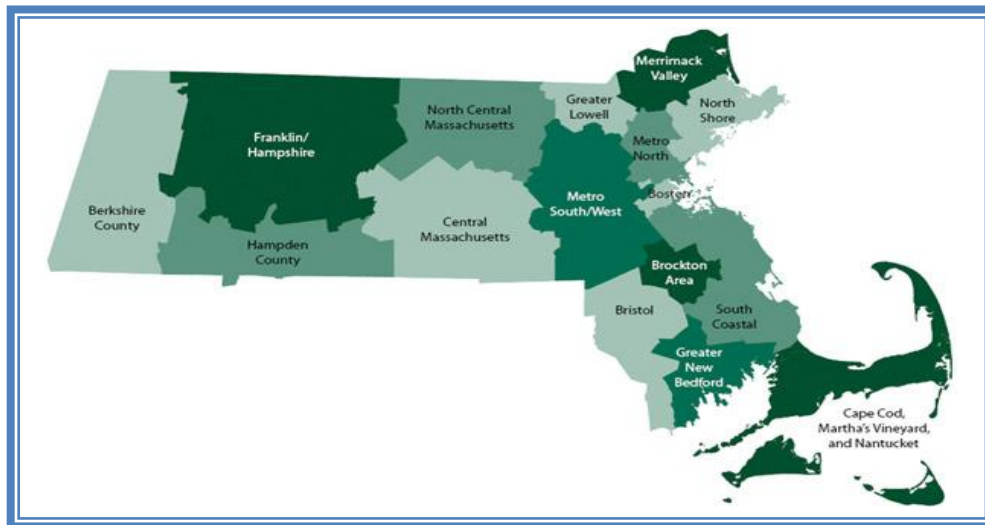
This plan has been developed to help the MassHire Central Region Workforce Board (MCRWB) set strategic priorities and guide our efforts to strengthen the workforce in Central MA. A fluid and living document, this plan is one of the many tools we use to make decisions.

The plan has been developed through an inclusive and collaborative process involving our partners and informed by data and labor market information. It helps us navigate the dynamic workforce development ecosystem, offering flexibility while pointing us in a determined direction.

II. Who We Are

The MCRWB is a public/private partnership serving needs of employers and employees. The board collaboratively develops and implements strategies for job readiness and skills advancement, leveraging and cost effectively applying community resources to promote economic wellness in the region's 38 cities and towns.

The MCRWB's primary role is convening civic and business leaders and utilizing their insights to strategically invest public funds and thereby build the skills of workers throughout our region. The MCRWB also oversees the region's One Stop Career Centers (MassHire Career Centers) in Worcester and Southbridge (henceforth referred to as our region's career centers).



The MCRWB serves the following 38 cities and towns in Central Massachusetts.: Worcester, Auburn, Oxford, Webster, West Boylston, Boylston, Shrewsbury Grafton, Millbury, Sutton, Douglas, Uxbridge, Northbridge, Upton, Northborough, Westborough, Milford, Hopedale, Mendon, Millville, Blackstone, Southbridge, Charlton, Sturbridge, Leicester, Spencer, Paxton, Holden, Rutland, Dudley, Oakham, New Braintree, Hardwick, North Brookfield, East Brookfield, Brookfield, West Brookfield, and Warren.

III. How We Operate

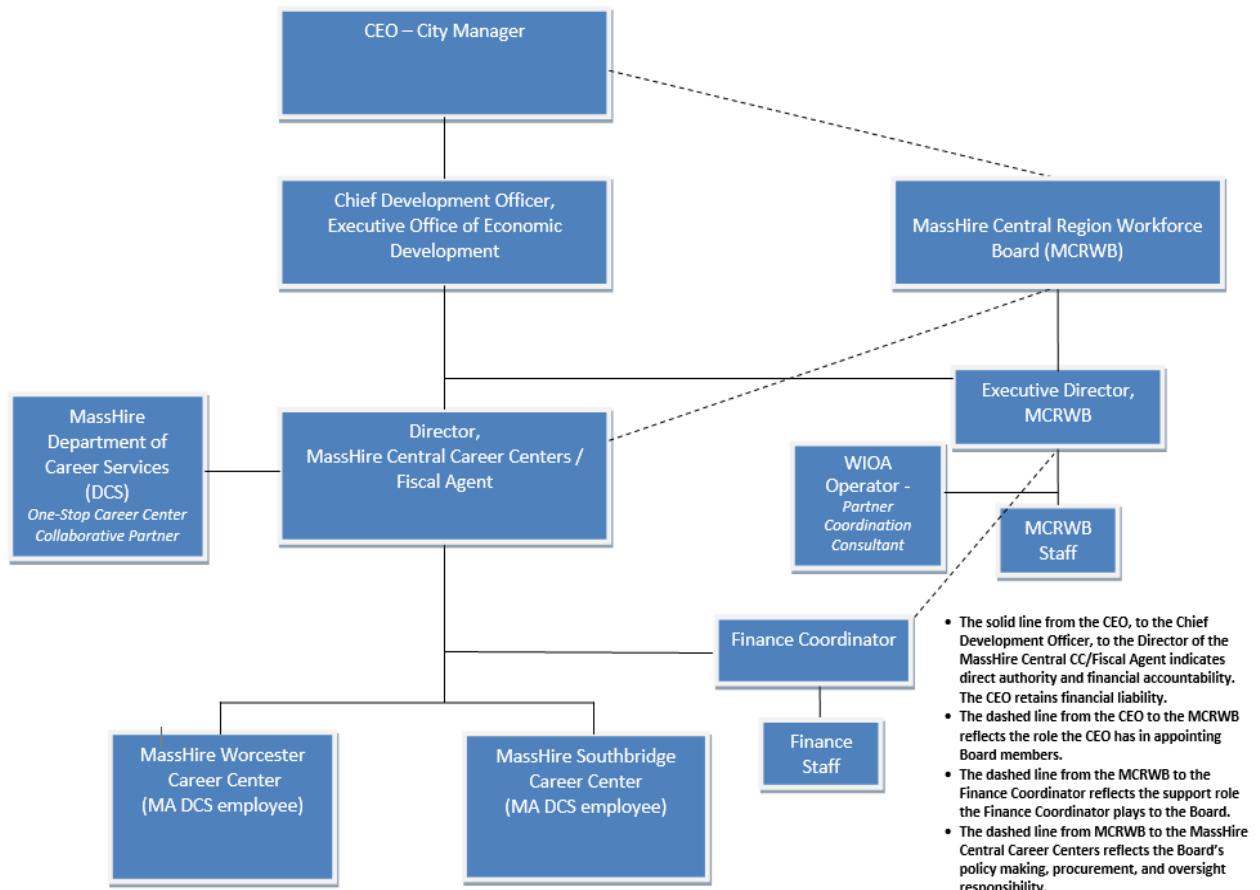
Illustrating the Workforce Development ecosystem within which MCRWB operates, the graphic below depicts the relationships between entities comprising the region’s Workforce Development System.

Our system is led by a Chief Elected Official (CEO); regionally, this position is held by the Worcester City Manager. The CEO holds primary fiduciary responsibility for the entire system and appoints members to the MCRWB.

The MCRWB and the region’s career centers operate as separate divisions within the City of Worcester's Executive Office of Economic Development. Both the Career Centers and the MCRWB receive administrative support from the Finance Coordinator and staff.

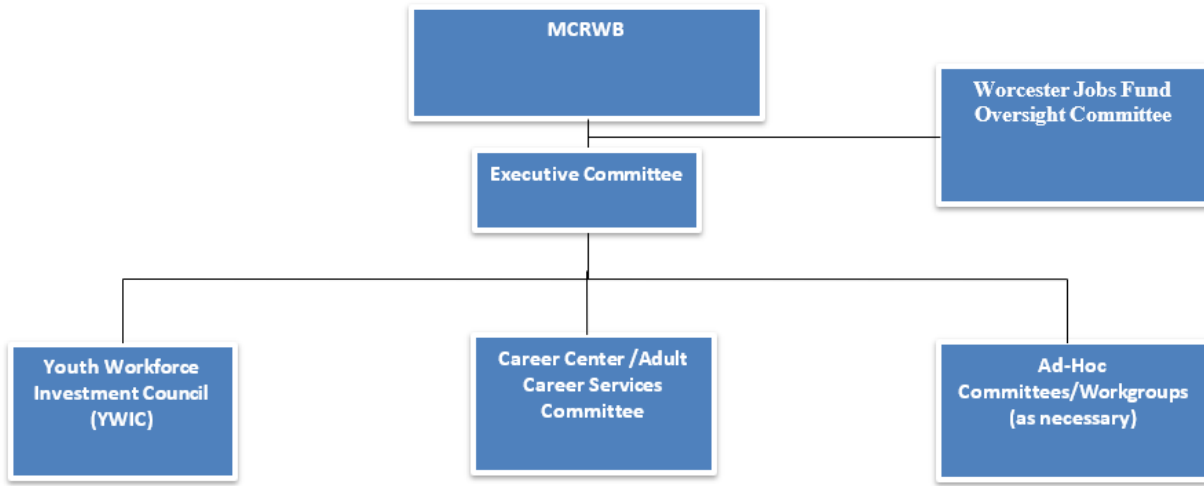
The MCRWB oversees the policies and performance of the region’s two career centers, youth programs, and other initiatives. The Career Center Director manages operations of the two career centers in Worcester and Southbridge, and oversees the day-to-day efforts of City of Worcester and the State Division of Career Services staff.

Central Massachusetts Workforce Development System



Within the Workforce Development system, the MCRWB has a full board whose members serve as the overarching and directing body, and whose Committees focus on priority areas. The MCRWB relies heavily on committee members to help execute our mission. The org chart below delineates Board Committees, their members, and their roles.

Executive Committee: Chaired by the MCRWB Chairperson, the Executive Committee is comprised of the chairs of all standing sub-committees, the Central Massachusetts Workforce Development Area WIOA Administrator, and at least four members appointed by the MCRWB



- Ad-Hoc Committees/Workgroups established by the Chair with approval from the board.
- The Worcester Jobs Fund Oversight Committee is housed within the MCRWB fiscally, but the Board does not oversee its work.

Chairperson. The Executive Committee has all the powers of the full MCRWB except those which by law or MCRWB by-laws may not be delegated to it. The Executive Committee meets monthly, except for the months the full board meets (January, April, July, and October).

Youth Workforce Investment Council (YWIC): YWIC duties include developing the portions of the Local Workforce Plan relating to eligible youth and recommending eligible providers of youth activities to be awarded grants or contracts on a competitive basis by the MCRWB. YWIC oversees and ensures delivery of youth services in a culturally sensitive manner and develops related initiatives as appropriate/necessary. Meetings are generally bi-monthly.

Career Center/Adult Career Pathways Committee: Comprised of a Chairperson (appointed annually by the MCRWB Chairperson) and additional members as appointed by the chair, the Career Center/Adult Career Pathways Committee makes recommendations to the MCRWB regarding career services offered to adults within the Central Massachusetts Workforce

Development Area, including overseeing the region’s career centers, designating priority industries and occupations, and ensuring the delivery of all services in a culturally sensitive manner. Meetings are generally bi-monthly.

Operating Principles

The following operating principles guide how MCRWB staff and members work toward the goals and activities identified in the strategic plan:

- **Integrity:** The MCRWB will follow all local, state, and federal rules and regulations and conduct our business with honesty and integrity.
- **Timeliness:** The MCRWB will respond to inquiries from partners and the public in a timely manner and will meet deadlines for reporting and programming.
- **Transparency:** The MCRWB will conduct its business and make decisions in a transparent manner and communicate these actions to members and the public to ensure that the MCRWB is viewed as an honest broker in the community.
- **Inclusivity:** When making policy and funding decisions regarding regional workforce development issues, the MCRWB will seek input from a representative sample of the communities we serve and will seek to convene and connect numerous diverse stakeholders.
- **Impact:** The MCRWB will seek to utilize its limited resources to maximize positive outcomes for those whom we serve. We will track and monitor our work to measure our impact.
- **Innovation:** The MCRWB will seek new and creative approaches to meet workforce development challenges and will work aggressively to gather the resources required to implement these new approaches.
- **Technological Savvy:** The MCRWB will seek to deploy new technologies to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our services.
- **Relevant:** The MCRWB will address publicly issues relating to workforce development and endeavor to be viewed by the community as a trusted, authoritative voice in these matters.

IV. Strategic Planning Process

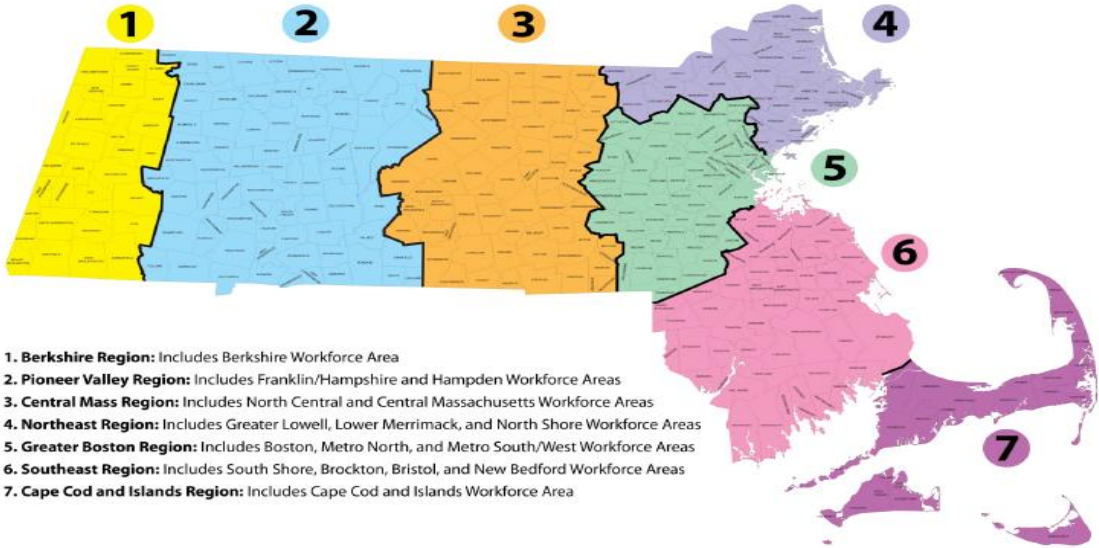
To complete our local Workforce Development Area’s strategic plan, sections of which inform this four-year plan, we first completed a long-term regional workforce blueprint in partnership with our colleagues from the MassHire North Central Workforce Board (see attachment 1). This plan reflects information and guidance from that blueprint. The blueprint itself comes from a federal mandate: Governors of every State are required under WIOA to submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Secretary of Labor that outlines a four-year workforce

development strategy for the State’s workforce development system.

As detailed in the Commonwealth’s WIOA State Plan, the Healey Administration has launched or continued several initiatives to better align the broadly defined workforce system with the needs of business and expand the impact on job outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment. One initiative that has been continued is the Workforce Skills Cabinet, which was created to align the resources of the Commonwealth’s Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Executive Office of Education, and the Executive Office of Housing and Development – agencies that administer major federal and state programs for job seekers and employers.

Through the Workforce Skills Cabinet, the Commonwealth established a regional planning process to match each region’s priorities with the Workforce Skills Cabinet’s three secretariats. The Commonwealth drew upon the WIOA Regional Planning process to create a new, integrated regional planning process across the economic, education and workforce Secretariats. Local MassHire Workforce Boards (working as multi-region partners) were tasked to convene regional

Regional Structure – Workforce Skills Cabinet Planning Regions



leaders in partnership with education and economic development partners and coordinate strategic workforce priorities, activities, and performance metrics. The Workforce Skills Cabinet combined the Commonwealth’s 16 workforce development regions into seven Workforce Skills Cabinet Planning regions. The Central Massachusetts region includes the Central MA and North Central MA Workforce Development Areas.

The regional planning process under the Workforce Skills Cabinet and WIOA seeks to adapt the same regional boundaries between economic development, workforce, education, and key

partners. The goal of this process is to scale regional workforce development models that provide workers with skills employers' demand.

Ultimately, the plan will ensure regional employers, educators, and workforce training officials coordinate efforts and invest resources to create robust talent pipelines for middle-skilled and highly skilled jobs in priority industries.

With these goals in mind, each region was asked to identify business demand for skills, create regional strategies, and align existing resources to this process. The regional planning process supports development of cross-secretariat partnerships formed to enhance sector initiatives/career pathway initiatives including education and training, credential attainment, work-based learning (OJTs or apprenticeships), etc.

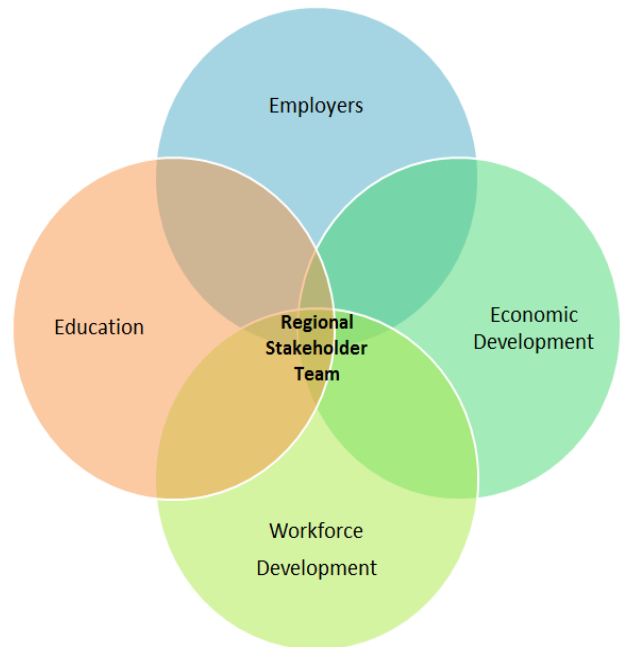
The goals of each region include:

- Identifying growth industries and occupations to be prioritized by system partners that will assist in the economic growth of the region;
- Developing joint actions to address skills gaps within these industries/occupations;
- Aligning and driving programming and service delivery across the three secretariats to meet the needs of the priority industries/occupations; and
- Helping residents gain the credentials, education, and job skills they need to secure successful, stable, and secure careers in high-demand industries.

How Regional Planning Works:

Eagerly embracing the concept of collaborative regional workforce planning, the two local workforce development boards (MCRWB and MassHire North Central) assembled a strong and diverse Stakeholder Steering Committee representing private industry, education, workforce development, and economic development. The team held several planning sessions, conducted employer feedback surveys, reviewed regional population demographics, labor market information, and identified additional relevant data to confirm industry priorities and supply gaps in our region.

The steering committee also established a Regional Planning Core Team, with representatives from the two workforce development boards, regional education institutions (Mount Wachusett Community College), and economic development (City of Worcester). The core team met several times over the same period to help the full team determine focus populations and cite labor market data to decide priority industry sectors, priority occupations within those sectors, educational opportunities, and economic development issues.



The Steering Committee developed and presented the draft blueprint to a statewide group of workforce peers and the three Secretariats, and, following further refinement, submitted the final plan to State officials in early 2018. The Regional blueprint was revised in Spring 2020 just as COVID-19 emerged—causing a six-month detour in workforce board and career center services. An updated version was submitted later that year which included local responses to the pandemic.

V. WIOA Local 4-Year Plan

This portion of our plan was created using the template supplied by the MA Department of Career Services (MA DCS) in Workforce Issuance 100 DCS 04.115.

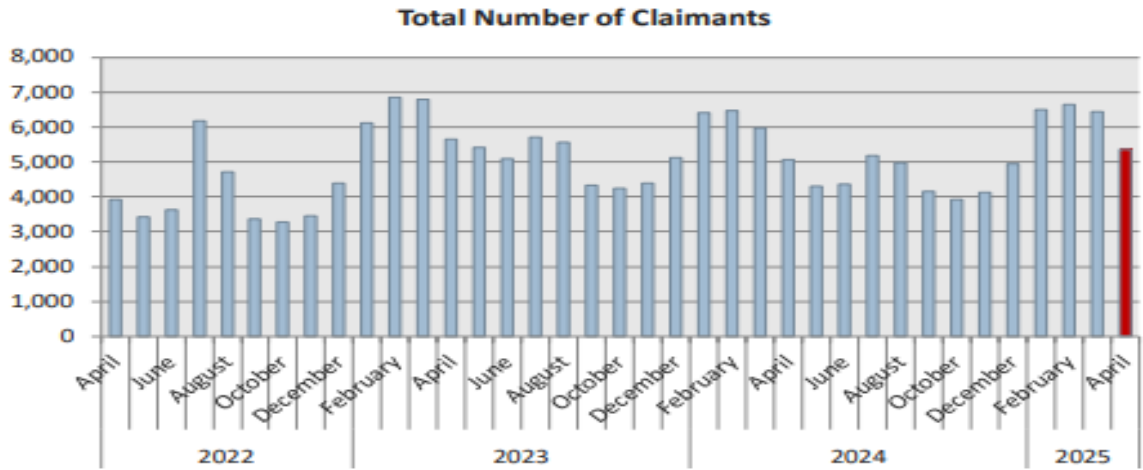
(a) Strategic Planning elements, including:

(1) Regional (local) analysis of:

- (i) Economic conditions including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations; and
- (ii) Employment needs of businesses in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.
- (iii) As appropriate, your local area may use an existing analysis, which is a timely current description of the regional economy, to meet the requirements of paragraphs (a)(1)(i) and (ii) of this section;

Review of Massachusetts labor market data

Unemployment rate trend: After the COVID-19 anomaly, the region’s unemployment rate has followed a traditional seasonal pattern of increases and decreases. These changes largely mirror the other regions in the State, showing significant improvement year-over-year.



An Economy Overview report for the Worcester Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) from Lightcast indicates the following labor market information:

873,651: Population (2024)

Grew by 44,324 over the last five years; projected to grow 32,396 over the next five years.

398,027: Total Regional Employment

Jobs grew by 244 over the last five years; projected to grow 11,468 over the next five years.

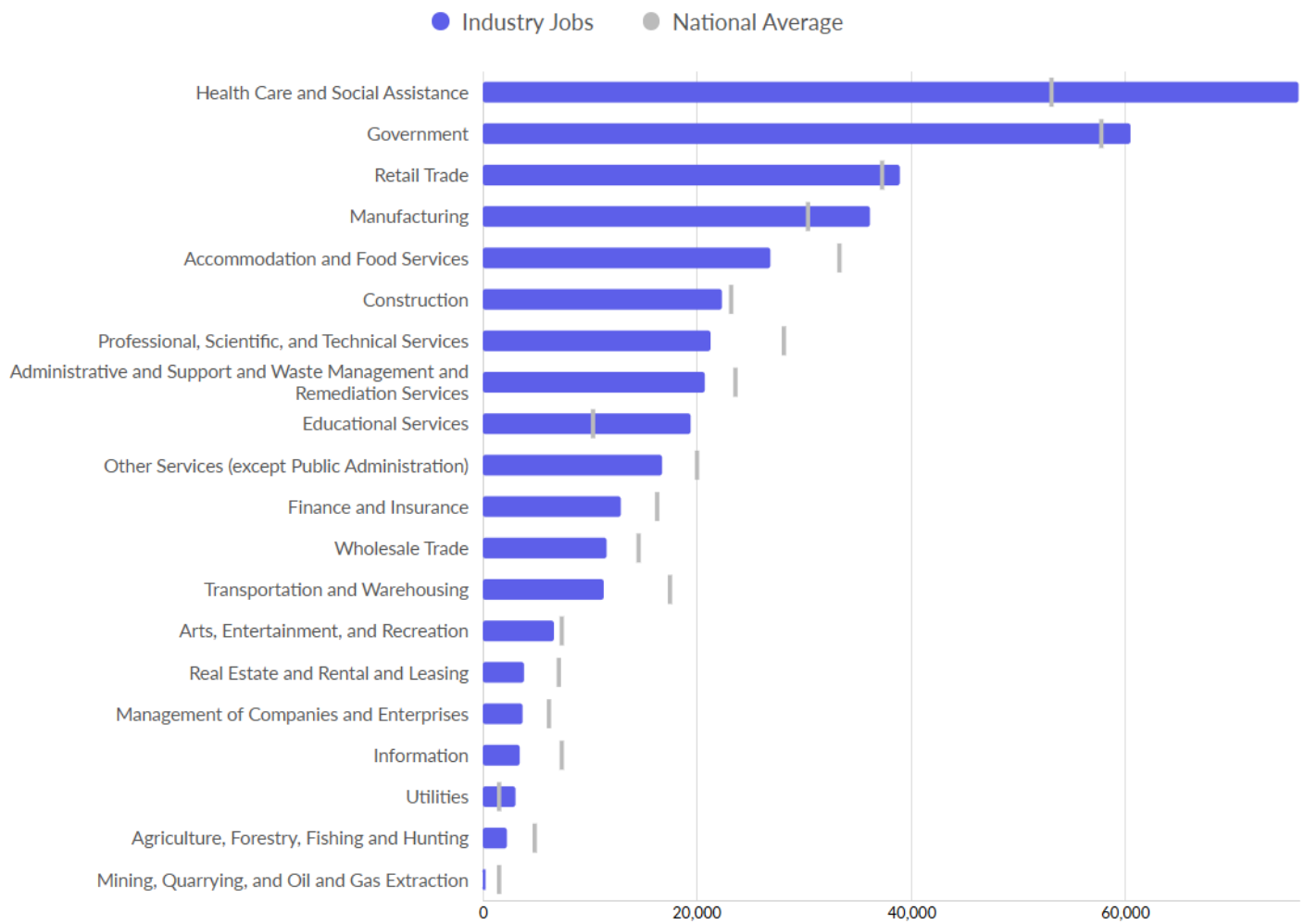
\$93.6K: Median Household Income (2023)

\$15K higher than the national median household income (\$78.5K).

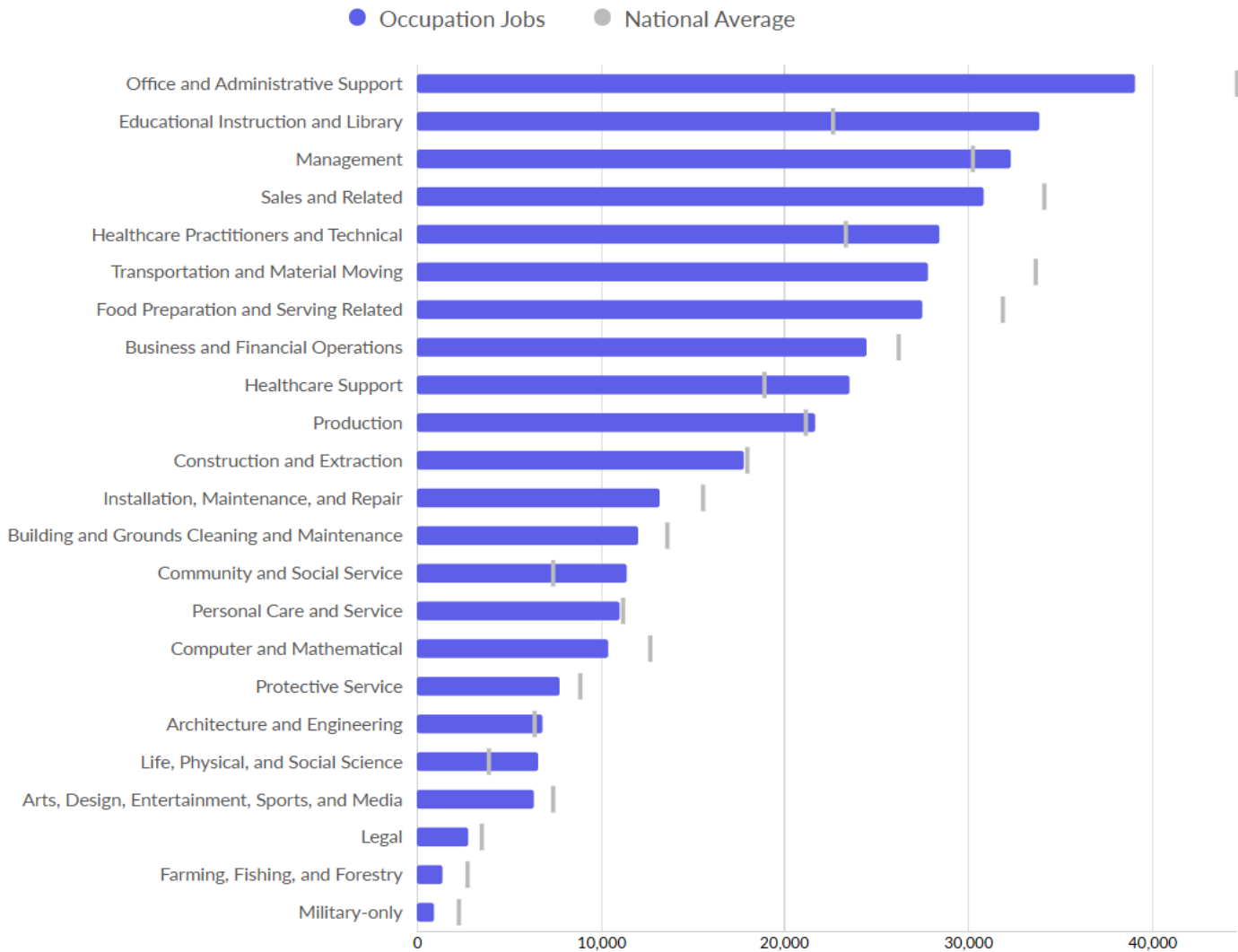
Additional Takeaways:

- As of 2024 the region's population increased by 5.3% since 2019 (up 44,324). Population is expected to increase by 3.7% from 2024-29, adding 32,396.
- From 2019-24, jobs increased 0.1% in Worcester County, MA from 397,783 to 398,027. This is less than the national increase of 4.1% by 4.0%.
- While the number of jobs increased from 2019-24, the labor force participation rate decreased from 69.2% to 66.4% over the same period.
- Labor force participation is of increasing concern in high-priority industries like manufacturing, as older workers "age out" of the system and are not replaced.
- Educational attainment: 22.6% of Worcester County, MA residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (1.1% above the national average), and 8.9% hold an Associate's Degree (similar to the national average).
- The region's top three industries in 2024: Education and Hospitals (Local Government), Restaurants and Other Eating Places, and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.

Regional Employment by Industry



Regional Employment by Occupation



Regional Workforce Blueprint

As stated previously, a detailed regional analysis of economic conditions was conducted as part of our regional workforce blueprint last year. This revision included existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations, as well as an analysis of employment needs of businesses in existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations. This process identified our priority industries:

- ✓ Healthcare & Social Assistance
- ✓ Manufacturing
- ✓ Transportation, Warehousing, and Logistics

And critical industries:

- ✓ Professional and Technical Services

- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Retail/Hospitality
- ✓ Education

Top occupations/occupational groups in which the Central MA region faces the most significant employee shortages:

- Occupational Group 1: Health Occupations (Certified Nursing Assistant; LPN; RN, Pharmacy Tech and Direct Care Worker)
- Occupational Group 2: Manufacturing Occupations (CNC Machinist; Quality Control Technician; Production Worker)
- Occupational Group 3: Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services Occupations (Software/Web Developer; Cyber Security; Bio-manufacturing Technicians)
- Occupational Group 4: Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics Occupations (Commercial Drivers; Diesel Technicians; auto technician)
- Occupational Group 5: Construction Occupations (HVAC Mechanics; Apprenticeship Trade Occupations; welding)

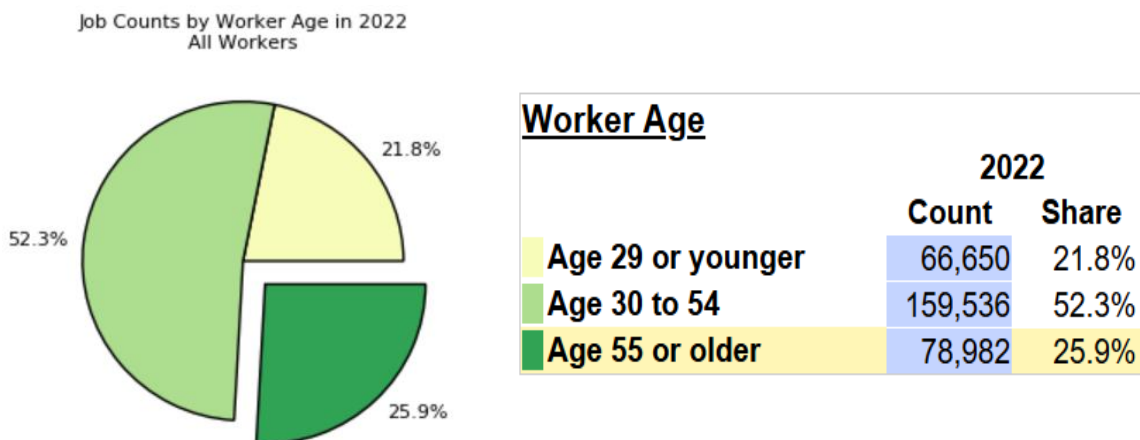
The pandemic created short-term impacts with long-term repercussions that continue to impact workforce development:

- While the manufacturing sector largely stayed the same as many companies kept up or switched production to needed supplies/equipment, the pandemic and increased benefits exacerbated staffing shortages that pre-dated COVID-19.
- The hiring bump COVID-19 generated in the Transportation, logistics, and Warehousing sector has fallen off, leaving in its wake a surplus of logistics professionals and warehouse staff.
- On the flip side, there is a sustained demand for licensed commercial drivers (Class A and Class B)
- The need for frontline allied health staff (certified nurses, phlebotomy techs, home health aides) has made the staff shortage critical—and since many training programs ceased operating during the outbreak, the pipeline of qualified entry-level staff is more constricted.
- Food Preparation and Serving Related (including hospitality workers), Construction, Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, Management – general office and Office & Administrative Support have largely rebounded.
- MassHire Career Centers are offering access to online career preparation classes through organizations like Goodwill (LearnFree courses), as well as discounted educational courses through EdEx, Coursera, Worcester Night Life, and free courses through the Commonwealth’s free Community College initiative – locally through Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) and Mount Wachusett Community College.
- MassHire Career Centers are also offering career technical training courses related to our priority occupations (e.g., healthcare, manufacturing, and CDL).

The blueprint identifies the most significant labor supply challenges and opportunities we project the region will face over the next five years based on our current workforce and reflecting challenges faced by emerging industries:

Aging Workforce

Based on employer feedback, one of the most significant challenges facing our businesses is finding and retaining talent. Employers report that the loss of older workers as they retire has created larger supply gaps in our priority industries; this is bolstered by 2022 US Census Bureau data for the region showing that 25.9% of our region’s workforce is aged 55 or older. An added challenge is bridging the so-called “Knowledge Gap”: When older, more experienced workers retire, it is difficult to replace them with workers who have similar knowledge and skills.



Lack of Employment Readiness & Social/Emotional Skills

Employers also bemoan the increasing frequency with which job candidates and new hires lack basic, necessary “soft skills” required to perform individually and on teams in the workplace. In particular, they cite skills such as time management, communication, social-emotional awareness, and teamwork. Compounding this challenge is the fact that these skills are both difficult to measure and to teach in classroom settings.

More Workers Who Need Basic English Proficiency

Demographic trends indicate that the region’s population growth has been fueled by net inflow of New Americans (immigrants, refugees). Over the past decade, the share of foreign-born residents has grown 8%, and the percent of residents in the region of Hispanic ethnicity has grown 14%. This influx of New Americans includes a significant portion with limited English proficiency (regionally, it is reported that 8% of residents have limited English proficiency).

Overcoming this barrier to employment typically requires remedial services in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and/or Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. The

current wait list for enrollment into ESOL classes exceeds 1,000 and funding for additional classes is limited. Depending on their work experience, New Americans may also need occupational training prior to being hired. Notable, a small percentage of immigrants/refugees arrive highly skilled but without credentials issued in the United States. They may require expensive certifications/credentials before being hired.

Limited Public Transportation

The Central MA area contains a few cities, numerous towns, and also rural communities. While this geographic spread lets residents experience the rich diversity of various communities, it makes transportation a challenge for people without a dependable vehicle.

Public transportation is available throughout much of the region on fixed bus routes from the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority, which serves 21 communities in the northern part of our region, and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority, which serves 35 communities. WRTA remains the nation's only free public transportation system (mid-sized cities). Connection to MBTA commuter rail service is offered in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Worcester, and paratransit service is available in most of the region.

Given the limited amount of fixed route service outside of the cities of Worcester and Fitchburg, using public transportation to access employment outside these cities is often not a viable option for job seekers/employees.

Additional, Tangential Trends

- Rapid expansion of automated services delivery in industries such as retail, manufacturing, and distribution.

- Communication and service delivery through smart phones continues to advance and has largely become the norm even for those with limited economic resources.

Based on the region's existing workforce, our top three broad labor supply opportunities over the next five years are:

- 1) Integrating New Americans into the workforce;
- 2) Incumbent staff development; and
- 3) Expanding the labor pool to non-traditional workers.

1) Integrating New Americans into the Workforce

The influx of people born outside the United States who settle in our region (i.e., immigrants, refugees, and other foreign-born residents legally able to work in the U.S.) has fueled growth of our region's workforce. This population peaked in 2023-24, creating an unprecedented wave of individuals needing English and career skill development. Throughout the Commonwealth, MassHire workforce boards and career centers responded quickly, setting up innovative systems and structures to accommodate demand.

In Central MA, the MCRWB and our career centers forged new partnerships with area

organizations serving immigrants/refugees/migrants along with housing and other social service agencies. We continue efforts to incorporate New Americans into our local economy amidst a dynamic and evolving set of challenges stemming from dramatic changes in Federal immigration and related policies that have left many New Americans confused, anxious, and afraid.

2) Incumbent Staff Development

Increasing the skills of current staff to meet company demand requires employer commitment to employee mentoring, training, and development. Employers and incumbent staff benefit when the former invest in developing the skills of the latter: Employees report feeling valued when they see that the company is investing in them. Professional growth and development helps employees expand their knowledge, skills, and abilities and apply new-found competencies. This translates into positive gains for the organization by enhanced organizational effectiveness, improved work quality, increased staff loyalty, and makes business more able to attract and retain top talent.

The MCRWB and representatives from the career center's Business Engagement Services Team (BEST) are working with businesses to develop incumbent staff by providing connections to or organic programs such as:

- Skills training, either in-house or through outside training centers
- Opportunities for promotion and/or career development
- Coaching and mentoring
- Tuition reimbursement
- Encouraging pursuit of continuing education
- Developing a formal Registered Apprenticeship Program to promote a set career advancement pathway for staff

Our experience shows that developing and deploying internal staff development programs is easier and more cost-effective than trying to lure workers from outside the region, especially for entry and middle-level jobs that typically do not pay enough to entice people to move. It also imposes additional costs on employers who seek to have a meaningful presence away from location(s) in which they are hiring.

3) Expanding the Labor Pool to Non-Traditional Workers

A third opportunity lies in expanding the existing labor pool through skill preparation, training, and work support for non-traditional workers in various industries. This includes hiring neuro divergent individuals, people with a disability, growing career opportunities for returning citizens, engaging veterans, and recruiting older workers seeking a second career.

In addition to the original blueprint's regional context, we're aggressively addressing areas that negatively affect the available labor force in our region:

- People working in low-wage – low advancement jobs: Help people working in “dead-

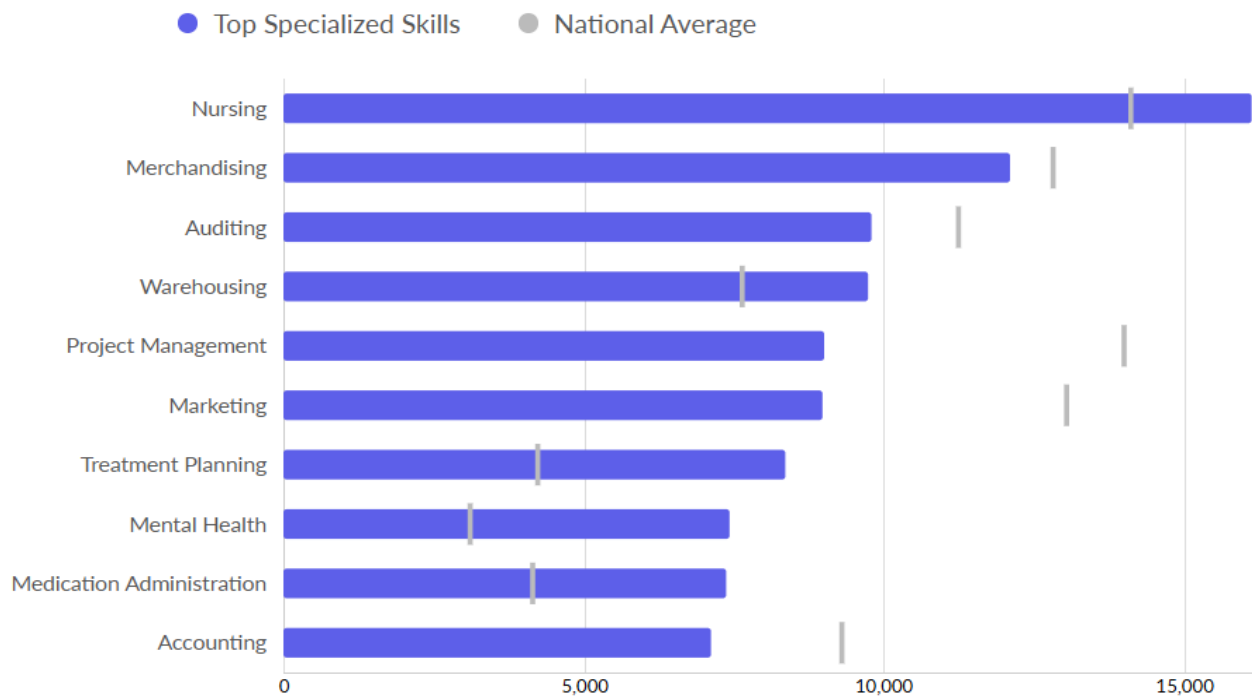
end jobs” develop the tools and skills necessary to move up and out of the cycle of poverty.

- People hesitant to move off of public supports due to the “cliff effect”: we continually look for ways to educate and support people as they strive to give up public assistance to enter/re-enter the workforce.
- People from families that lack college education: While there are numerous opportunities to exit poverty through jobs requiring middle skills (less than a four-year degree), the need for an Associate’s Degree or higher often serves as a significant barrier to earning a living wage. The challenge of helping more people attain college degrees is increased by other factors, not the least of which is that the notion of attending college seems beyond their reach. Helping them see themselves as a successful college graduate is part of the needed solution.

(2) Describe the knowledge and skills needed to meet the employment needs of the businesses in your region, including employment needs in in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

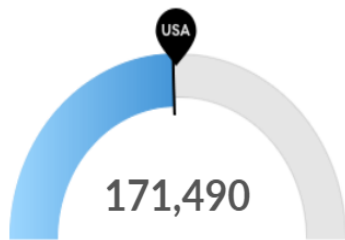
Central MA employers routinely cite the need for “soft skills” or “foundational readiness skills” such as time management, the ability to take direction, teamwork, self-regulation/emotional control, and effective communication skills.

A review of the Lightcast regional job postings for the Worcester MSA indicates the following in-demand skills:



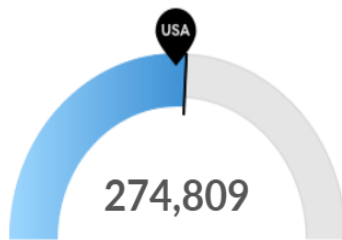
(3) Please provide an analysis of your regional workforce, including current labor force

employment and unemployment data, information on labor market trends, and educational and skill levels of the workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment. A review of our regional workforce shows an aging labor pool that is diverse:



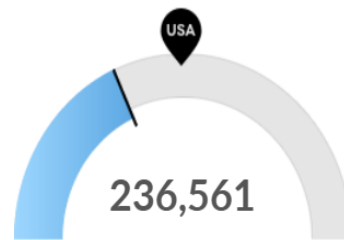
Millennials

Worcester, MA has 171,490 millennials (ages 25-39). The national average for an area this size is 176,133.



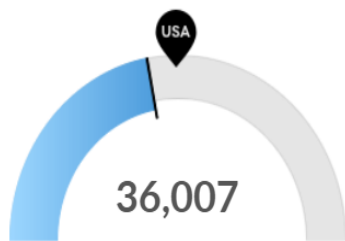
Retiring Soon

Retirement risk is about average in Worcester, MA. The national average for an area this size is 261,686 people 55 or older, while there are 274,809 here.



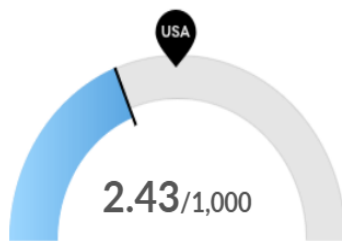
Racial Diversity

Racial diversity is low in Worcester, MA. The national average for an area this size is 361,024 racially diverse people, while there are 236,561 here.



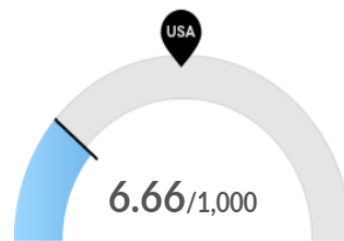
Veterans

Worcester, MA has 36,007 veterans. The national average for an area this size is 42,886.



Violent Crime

Worcester, MA has 2.43 violent crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 3.54 per 1,000 people.



Property Crime

Worcester, MA has 6.66 property crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 18.02 per 1,000 people.

A comparison of the labor force and employment/unemployment rates in Central MA versus the Commonwealth as a whole and other regions, our region has a similar unemployment rate (4.6%) as the Statewide average, with a year-to-year uptick of 4,285 unemployed in April, 2025.

Labor Force, Employment and Unemployment Massachusetts and Workforce Development Areas

Data not seasonally adjusted

[Download as CSV](#)

RESULTS

Location	Labor Force			Employment			Unemployment			Rate		
	Apr-2025	Mar-2025	Apr-2024	Apr-2025	Mar-2025	Apr-2024	Apr-2025	Mar-2025	Apr-2024	Apr-2025	Mar-2025	Apr-2024
Massachusetts	3,941,249	3,937,306	3,868,248	3,760,501	3,742,000	3,735,961	180,748	195,306	132,287	4.6%	5.0%	3.4%
Berkshire County WDA	64,073	64,660	63,148	61,071	61,284	60,880	3,002	3,376	2,268	4.7%	5.2%	3.5%
Boston WDA	403,680	402,630	397,464	386,101	384,607	384,682	17,579	18,023	12,782	4.4%	4.5%	3.2%
Bristol County WDA	214,942	214,848	211,733	203,879	202,580	203,512	11,063	12,268	8,221	5.1%	5.7%	3.9%
Brockton WDA	144,564	144,438	142,478	137,385	136,949	137,040	7,179	7,489	5,438	5.0%	5.2%	3.8%
Cape & Islands WDA	136,101	134,101	128,691	127,728	123,799	122,367	8,373	10,302	6,324	6.2%	7.7%	4.9%
Central MA WDA	342,563	342,717	336,084	326,867	325,684	324,673	15,696	17,033	11,411	4.6%	5.0%	3.3%
Franklin/Hampshire WDA	132,547	133,240	130,370	126,879	126,961	126,352	5,668	6,279	4,018	4.3%	4.7%	3.1%
Greater Lowell WDA	169,231	168,843	166,072	161,361	160,586	160,256	7,870	8,257	5,816	4.7%	4.9%	3.5%
Greater New Bedford WDA	116,240	116,599	114,341	109,540	108,943	109,324	6,700	7,656	5,017	5.8%	6.6%	4.4%
Hampden County WDA	229,333	229,285	224,238	216,659	215,613	214,534	12,674	13,672	9,704	5.5%	6.0%	4.3%
Lower Merrimack Valley WDA	206,105	205,743	202,251	195,918	195,002	194,632	10,187	10,741	7,619	4.9%	5.2%	3.8%
Metro North WDA	505,940	504,756	497,129	486,131	483,846	482,993	19,809	20,910	14,136	3.9%	4.1%	2.8%
Metro South/West WDA	554,994	554,344	545,970	533,025	530,799	530,165	21,969	23,545	15,805	4.0%	4.2%	2.8%
North Central WDA	144,488	144,618	141,334	137,096	136,569	136,174	7,392	8,049	5,160	5.1%	5.6%	3.7%
North Shore WDA	248,376	248,196	243,815	237,227	236,112	235,670	11,149	12,084	8,145	4.5%	4.9%	3.3%
South Shore WDA	328,063	328,303	323,137	313,628	312,675	312,715	14,435	15,628	10,422	4.4%	4.8%	3.2%

The labor force estimates for towns with 2010 Census population of less than 1,000 were produced using the BLS methodology, but are not official BLS estimates.

A detailed look at the year-over-year unemployment statistics for the Central MA region shows that the number of claimants has risen moderately for many occupations and industries year over year from April 2024 to April 2025.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA (WDA) MONTHLY SERIES

Published By:

Central MA WDA

UI Claimant Characteristics Report

Week Ending 04-12-2025 (Preliminary)



This report provides summary information on selected characteristics of Central MA WDA residents claiming unemployment insurance (UI) benefits during a reference week. Characteristics include age; educational attainment; and industry, occupation and average weekly wages prior to their UI claim. The data and information for Massachusetts statewide and by Local Workforce Development Area for those claiming the week ending 04-12-2025 can be found at: <https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/LMI/ClaimantProfiles>.

Source: MA DUA compiled by MA DER

Claimants by Occupations

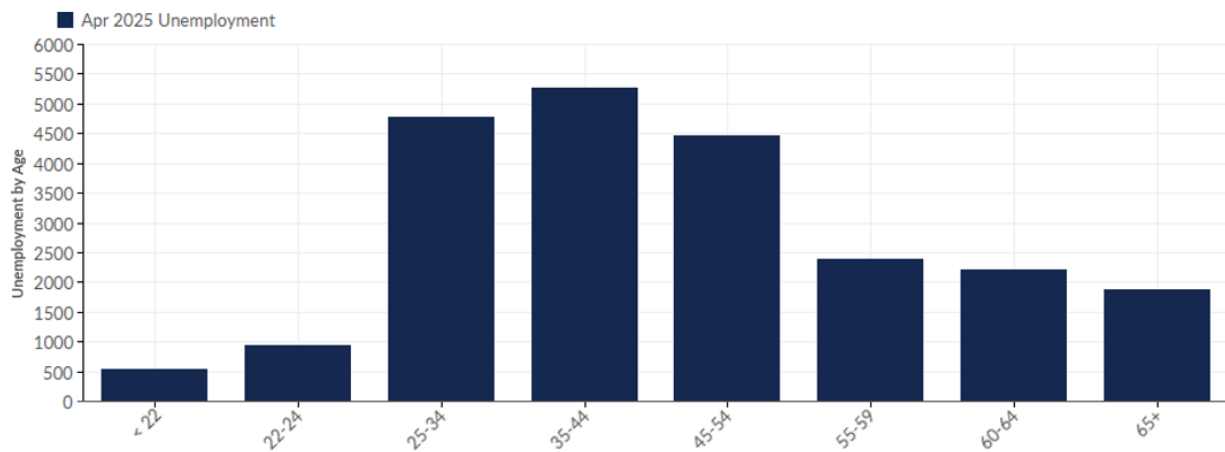
SOC #	Claimant Count by SOC Occupation Name	April-25	March-25	OTM Change	April-24	OTY Change
11	Management	796	831	↓ (35)	773	↑ 23
13	Business & Financial Operations	281	291	↓ (10)	265	↑ 16
15	Computer & Mathematical	217	212	↑ 5	219	↓ (2)
17	Architecture & Engineering	117	129	↓ (12)	110	↑ 7
19	Life, Physical, & Social Science	121	102	↑ 19	90	↑ 31
21	Community & Social Service	94	88	↑ 6	78	↑ 16
23	Legal Occupations	16	16	→ -	13	↑ 3
25	Education, Training, & Library	54	52	↑ 2	52	↑ 2
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	69	81	↓ (12)	69	→ -
29	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	104	119	↓ (15)	99	↑ 5
31	Healthcare Support	184	188	↓ (4)	158	↑ 26
33	Protective Service	69	64	↑ 5	48	↑ 21
35	Food Preparation & Serving Related	195	262	↓ (67)	201	↓ (6)
37	Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	298	700	↓ (402)	353	↓ (55)
39	Personal Care & Service	43	61	↓ (18)	45	↓ (2)
41	Sales & Related	276	291	↓ (15)	285	↓ (9)
43	Office & Administrative Support	471	475	↓ (4)	427	↑ 44
45	Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	20	37	↓ (17)	32	↓ (12)
47	Construction & Extraction	948	1,312	↓ (364)	840	↑ 108
49	Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	229	288	↓ (59)	168	↑ 61
51	Production	279	279	→ -	268	↑ 11
53	Transportation & Material Moving	447	519	↓ (72)	427	↑ 20
55	Military Specific	5	5	→ -	4	↑ 1
	Information Not Available	16	21	↓ (5)	22	↓ (6)
	All Occupations	5,349	6,423	↓ (1,074)	5,046	↑ 303

Claimants by Industry

NAICS #	Claimant Count by NAICS Industry Name	April-25	March-25	OTM Change	April-24	OTY Change
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	37	74	↓ (37)	42	↓ (5)
22	Utilities	18	22	↓ (4)	24	↓ (6)
23	Construction	1,054	1,447	↓ (393)	938	↑ 116
31-33	Manufacturing	292	324	↓ (32)	312	↓ (20)
42	Wholesale Trade	256	277	↓ (21)	207	↑ 49
44-45	Retail Trade	381	402	↓ (21)	426	↓ (45)
48-49	Transportation & Warehousing	147	159	↓ (12)	188	↓ (41)
51	Information	110	116	↓ (6)	115	↓ (5)
52	Finance & Insurance	178	160	↑ 18	149	↑ 29
53	Real Estate, Rental, & Leasing	73	73	→ -	63	↑ 10
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	633	626	↑ 7	575	↑ 58
55	Management of Companies & Enterprises	34	38	↓ (4)	40	↓ (6)
56	Admin. & Support, Waste Manag., and Remed. Serv.	554	884	↓ (330)	537	↑ 17
61	Educational Services	101	86	↑ 15	75	↑ 26
62	Health Care & Social Assistance	429	430	↓ (1)	393	↑ 36
71	Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	120	219	↓ (99)	122	↓ (2)
72	Accommodation & Food Services	243	312	↓ (69)	239	↑ 4
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	314	371	↓ (57)	259	↑ 55
92	Public Administration	82	104	↓ (22)	80	↑ 2
	Information Not Available	284	284	→ -	258	↑ 26
All Industries		5,349	6,423	↓ (1,074)	5,046	↑ 303

Note: OTM = Over-The-Month, OTY = Over-The-Year

Unemployment by Age



Education

22.6% of Worcester County, MA residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (1.1% above the national average), and 8.9% hold an Associate's Degree (aligned with the national average).



	% of Population	Population
● Less Than 9th Grade	3.6%	22,068
● 9th Grade to 12th Grade	5.1%	31,482
● High School Diploma	26.1%	161,224
● Some <u>College</u>	16.9%	104,290
● <u>Associate's Degree</u>	8.9%	55,023
● Bachelor's Degree	22.6%	139,711
● Graduate Degree and Higher	16.9%	104,785

(4) Please provide an analysis of workforce development activities, including education and training, in the local area. This analysis must:

- a) include strengths and weaknesses of workforce development activities.
- b) address the capacity to provide the workforce development activities around:
 - i. education and skill needs of the workforce;
 - ii. individuals with barriers to employment;
 - iii. employment needs of businesses.
- c) describe the local area's work with community colleges and Career Technical initiatives, etc.

Please refer to our regional blueprint for a more detailed description of regional education and training providers and programs. This description illuminates the region's wide variety and diversity of training capacity offered by community-based nonprofit organizations, for-profit schools and organizations, public and private K-12 institutions (and vocational high schools), two-year and community colleges, and four-year and advanced degree colleges and universities. These include:

- Anna Maria College
- Assabet Valley Regional Technical

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School • Assumption College • Bay Path University • Blackstone Valley Vocational Regional School District • Clark University • College of the Holy Cross • Fitchburg State University • MCPHS University • Mount Wachusett Community College • Nichols College • Quinsigamond Community College • Rob Roy Academy-Worcester • Salter College-West Boylston | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern Worcester County Regional Vocational School District • Spa Tech Institute-Westboro • Tufts University • University of Massachusetts Medical School Worcester • University of Phoenix-Massachusetts • Worcester Polytechnic Institute • Worcester State University • Worcester Tech HS - Night Life • Assabet After Dark • Monty Tech evening • MassMEP • Worcester Jobs Fund |
|--|--|

While the large number of providers is a strength, there are some regional weaknesses: Some institutions have traditionally not worked with each other to establish an easy to navigate education and training ladder or network. Additionally, some schools/providers have limited capacity to offer instruction in areas such as ESOL, “soft skills”/career readiness skills, or career planning and placement. These deficiencies affect individuals with barriers to employment even more than those without barriers: The former frequently lack access to resources (personal and professional)—particularly networks that could help them get educational services and/or credentials to advance their careers.

As part of the blueprint implementation, we have developed regional workforce consortia for our three priority industry sectors to support the growth of these programs and help meet the needs of regional employers. This effort is advanced by a detailed mapping exercise which identifies gaps and areas of needed expansion efforts by our Regional Workforce Consortia (developed to implement our regional blueprint), as well as support for increased linkages or articulation agreements between institutions.

Our work with regional WIOA Partner Quinsigamond Community College (QCC) is robust and mutually beneficial. QCC leadership is represented on our Board; a QCC staff member is co-located part-time in the career center to promote the school and the Commonwealth’s free community college opportunity; MassHire career center staff coordinate closely with the PT QCC staffer for education, training, and employment opportunities. MassHire career center also promote QCC’s CTI programs to job seekers. Finally, the MCRWB Executive Director is also on a MA Workforce Association task force to further strengthen connections between MassHire and community colleges – especially related to job placement support for community college graduates/program completers.

(5) Please describe the MassHire Board’s strategic vision to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. Include goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce (including youth and individuals with barriers to employment), and goals relating to the performance accountability measures based on performance indicators described in §

677.155(a)(1). The primary indicators of performance include:

- a. The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- b. The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
- c. Median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- d. The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training (OJT) and customized training) who attained a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within 1 year after exit from the program.

The MCRWB’s strategic vision to support regional economic growth and economic self-sufficiency combines a demand-focused approach to career center services with ongoing (often customized) support for job seekers with barriers to employment. This robust support includes career center services such as counseling, work-readiness and job search assistance, access to training information and funding (for eligible career center customers), and placement assistance. These are tied to our blueprint implementation and WIOA Partner efforts through our regional system of committee and working groups that direct resources to those in need. The region’s FY 2025 WIOA goals are:

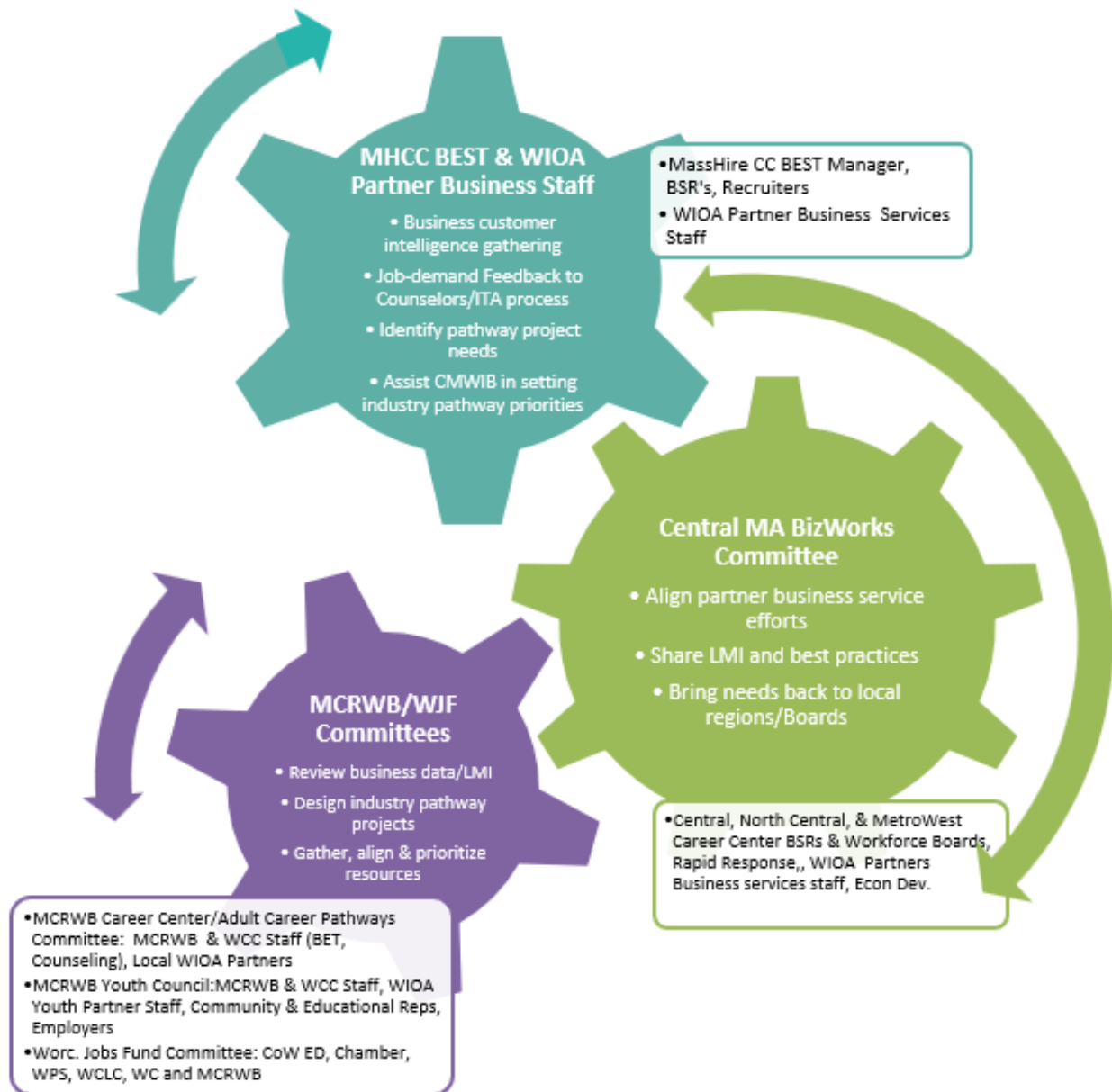
WIOA PERFORMANCE MEASURES	FY 2025Goals
<u>WIOA Adult Measures</u>	
Employment Q2	75.4%
Employment Q4	71.9%
Median Earnings Q2	\$10,986
Credential Rate	68.3%
Measurable Skill Gain	52.4%
<u>WIOA Dislocated Worker Measures</u>	
Employment Q2	77.1%
Employment Q4	78.8%
Median Earnings Q2	\$13,929
Credential Rate	76.4%
Measurable Skill Gain	58%
<u>WIOA Youth Measures</u>	
Employment/Education Q2	78.9%
Employment/Education Q4	69.8%
Median Earnings Q2	\$5,047
Credential Rate	72.3%
Measurable Skill Gain	63.3%

(6) Considering analyses described in 1 through 4 above, please describe your strategy to work with the entities that carry out the core programs and workforce system partners to align available resources to achieve the strategic vision and goals described in paragraph (a)(5) of this section.

We strive to strengthen and sustain a regional workforce development system that quickly, efficiently, and effectively meets the needs of employers and job seekers. In this system, Board and career center staff coordinate with stakeholders to conceive, design, implement, operate, and improve connections between workforce talent and employers who need their talents. As shown below, this undertaking engages and involves a large and diverse ecosystem of committed individuals and organizations who understand the need to create and implement streamlined, coordinated procedures:

- The MCRWB and committees (Adult Career Pathways Committee and Youth Workforce Investment Council)
- Regional workforce consortia to connect and align employers and area education and training providers to ensure an effective and efficient use of training resources
- Regional WIOA partners (connected via our regional WIOA Partner leadership team, joint case-management group, professional development group, and referral process)
- MassHire BizWorks regional team (meets bi-monthly to discuss industry trends, available resources, and new programming to serve businesses)
- Regional business network peer to peer group (online community in which MassHire BizWorks partners share info and coordinate projects in real-time)
- School-industry advisory committees (including K-12 voc-tech program committees, community college advisory committees, and the Grafton Job Corps Industry Council)
- Regional industry employer groups (Chamber of Commerce roundtables, MA Restaurant Association, MassMEP, to name a few)

Central MA Demand-Driven Program Development



(b) Under WIOA, the plan must include a description of the following requirements (WIOA secs. 108(b)(2)–(21)):

- (1) Identify the following elements of the workforce development system in your local area:
 - a. Programs that are included in your local workforce system (please list programs).

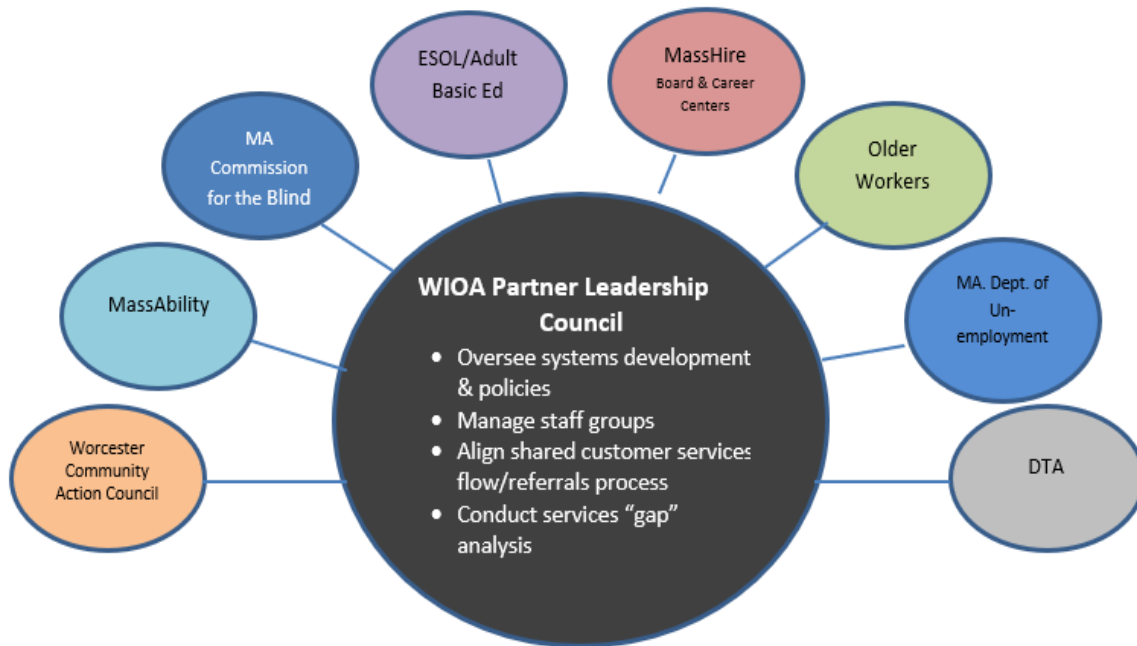
Our regional workforce system includes the following WIOA Partners:

- The Adult Program (Title I), as part of the Department of Career Services (DCS), Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD);
- The Dislocated Worker Program (Title I), as part of DCS/EOLWD;
- The Youth Program (Title I), as part of DCS/EOLWD;
- The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II), as part of Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Executive Office of Education (EOE); represented by the Worcester Public Schools, the Webster Public Schools, Training Resources of America, and Ascentria Community Services, Inc., Quinsigamond Community College, Sheriff's Department of Worcester, and Catholic Charities.
- The Wagner-Peyser Act Program (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III), as part of DCS, EOLWD; represented through the region's OSCC operator, WCCC;
- The Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV), as part of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS);
- Federal-state unemployment compensation program, as part of the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), EOLWD;
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.)), as part of DCS, EOLWD;
- Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (Programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.) as part of DCS, EOLWD;
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) as part of Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), EOHHS;
- Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)), as part of DTA, EOHHS;
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) (Programs authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.));
- The Worcester Community Action Council: Federally-designated anti-poverty agency for Worcester and 45 neighboring communities [non-WIOA partner];
- Job Corps (Operated in Central MA at the Grafton Job Corps Center by Adams and Associates, Inc.;
- YouthBuild (Operated in Central MA by Training Resources of America, Inc.

b. How your Board will support the strategies identified in the State Plan and work with the entities carrying out core programs and other workforce development programs, including programs of study authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.) to support service alignment.

Our Board's WIOA partnership activities are coordinated through a partner leadership council

and committees aligned with the MCRWB and its committees. Partners align programs and services according to our region’s Memorandum of Understanding (Attachment 3) including shared referral processes, joint professional development, etc.)

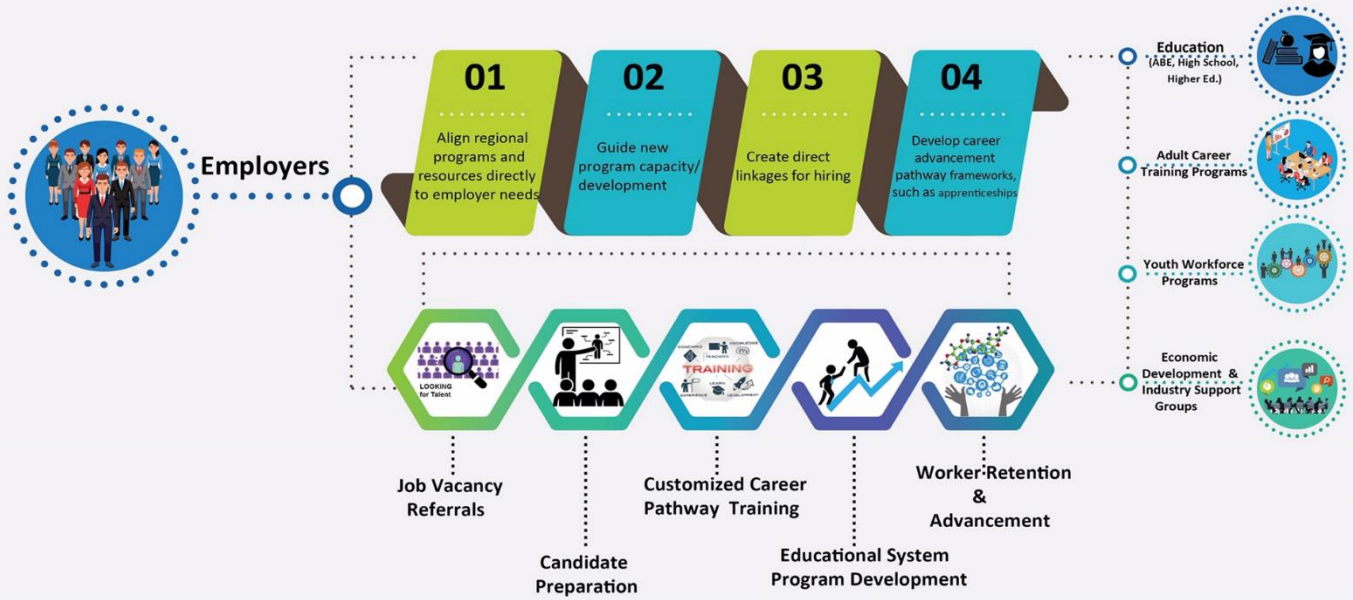


- (2) Please describe how your Board will work with entities carrying out core programs to:
- a. Expand access to employment, training, education, and supportive services for eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals with barriers to employment.
 - b. Facilitate the development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs; and
 - c. Improve access to activities leading to a recognized postsecondary credential (including a credential that is an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable).

As noted above, our regional Partners coordinate service delivery through our regional Partner Leadership Council, the MCRWB and committees, and other regional committees and workgroups. We established regional workforce consortia for our top priority industries to better connect employers with training providers and educators and other industry support entities. Consortia members communicate employer workforce needs and recommend best practices to expand access to employment, training, education, and support services for eligible individuals, particularly those with barriers to employment. Finally, consortia members facilitate development of career pathways and co-enrollment, as appropriate, in core programs. This helps improve access to training that leads to recognized postsecondary credentials (including credentials that are an industry-recognized certificate or certification, portable, and stackable).

Central MA Workforce Consortia

A sector-based "one-door" approach to connect employers with workforce development partners



(3) Please describe the strategies and services that will be used in your local area:

- a. To facilitate engagement of businesses in workforce development programs, including small businesses and businesses in high- demand industry sectors and occupations.
- b. To serve agricultural businesses including plans to improve those services.
- c. To support a local workforce development system that meets the needs of businesses.
- d. To better coordinate workforce development programs and economic development.
- e. To strengthen linkages between reemployment assistance and unemployment insurance programs.
- f. Describe how your Board coordinates workforce investment activities carried out in the local area with statewide Rapid Response activities.
- g. Please describe procedures to offer MassHire Career Center Business Services and MassHire BizWorks programs to local businesses.
- h. Describe implementation of any initiatives such as incumbent worker training programs, on-the-job training programs, customized training programs, industry and sector strategies, career pathways initiatives, utilization of effective business intermediaries, and other business services and strategies designed to meet the needs of regional businesses. These initiatives must support the strategy described in paragraph (b)(3) of this section.

The MCRWB uses the three core strategies to meet the needs of our region's businesses (including small businesses), to coordinate with our regional education and economic development partners, and to strengthen our career center delivery system and unemployment insurance program:

1. Engaging employers through our MCRWB and committees;
2. Developing an employer demand driven system at our region's career centers;
3. Coordinating regional business services with regional workforce, education, and economic development partners.

Employer Engagement

The MCRWB attempts to ensure Board and committee membership reflects demographics of regional employers. We therefore engage employers from diverse industries such as healthcare, education, retail, manufacturing, and construction (to name a few). We emphasize participation from small businesses, particularly WBE and MBE. Recognizing that many business leaders cannot take time away from their duties to engage actively as a Board or committee member, we routinely include industry group representatives to help ensure their industry's voice is heard. This includes the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce, the MA Restaurant Association, the Mass Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MassMEP), and the Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC).

Develop an Employer Demand Driven System at Regional Career Centers

As noted, the MCRWB has moved to a demand-facing model that prioritizes business services and utilizes direct referrals. To do so, MCRWB leadership and staff worked with career center leadership to reorganize staff, redesign job duties), provide meaningful, memorable, and measurable staff training, improve customer flow processes, create new standard operating procedures, and develop new reporting metrics.

A byproduct of this new local Business Service model was a review (initiated by career center staff) of the current Job Match function at our two career centers. An internal development team subsequently established a new, more effective and efficient job matching program to increase the relevancy of job leads for career center customers. The program takes advantage of new technology-based staff tools, including "computer to text" messaging by staff to job seekers. Regional staff developed enhanced reporting metrics that have been shared with State officials.

Regarding item (ii) above ("serve agricultural businesses and how you intend to improve those services"), our regional WIOA partnership Leadership Council now includes representation from the New England Farm Workers' Council. The MCRWB has had representatives of the Massachusetts Migrant Farm Worker program meet with our WIOA Partner Leadership Council. We continue coordinating with local organizations like the CMRPC and the Regional Environmental Council to support urban farming programs. Finally, we have pledged support for a new agricultural vocational program with one of our high school districts in a more rural part of our region.

Coordinate Regional Business Services with Regional Workforce, Education, & Economic Development Partners

The MCRWB intentionally connected many regional programs and staff involved in workforce development with our education and economic development partners; this includes State Rapid Response and career center staff, WIOA partners, economic development officials (state and local), educational and career technical training institutions (including K-12, higher education, and career technical training providers), community-based organizations, and others.

To coordinate and sustain these efforts, and to identify and develop new career pathway programs, the MCRWB created synergistic and symbiotic relationships between our Career Center/Adult Career Pathways Committee and Youth Workforce Investment Council, the WIOA Partner Leadership Council and its committees, and the regional MassHire BizWorks group led by the MA Rapid Response unit. This has been done using cross-representation and cross-pollination amongst groups and standing meeting agenda items to ensure partners get timely and relevant information.

- (4) Please provide a description of how your Board:
- a. Coordinates local workforce investment activities with regional economic development activities.
 - b. Promotes entrepreneurial skills training and microenterprise services.

As cited in previous sections, our efforts to align and coordinate services through a regional demand-driven approach and by utilizing various existing boards, committees, and workgroups allow us to work closely with regional economic development officials in innovative, productive, cost-effective, and mutually beneficial ways.

The MCRWB is also part of the Central MA Regional Planning Commission's Southern Worcester County Economic Development Organization leadership committee: This organization gathers representatives from area economic development municipal offices, chambers of commerce, community and business leaders, and educational institutions to oversee implementation of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) submitted to federal officials.

The MCRWB is an active member of the MA Expanding Business Engagement Initiative (MassHire BizWorks): The MCRWB and career center staff participate with state Rapid Response, Division of Career Services, and MA Office of Business Development officials to improve coordination and alignment of business services statewide. Locally, a Central MA work group has been established as a part of this effort. New partners are encouraged to get involved.

Our career centers invest time and talent to forge productive partnerships with organizations

offering entrepreneurial support through the Worcester Business Resource Alliance (WBRA). As part of this linkage, officials from the City of Worcester's Office of Economic Development often conduct workshops on how to start your own business at the region's career centers. Participants seeking further assistance are referred to the WBRA's network of partners depending upon their need. Finally, the Small Business Development Center is represented on the MCRWB Board to help our workforce system support the unique needs of small businesses.

- (5) Please describe the MassHire Career Center system in your area, including:
- a. How the Board ensures the continuous improvement of eligible providers and that such providers will meet the employment needs of local businesses, workers and job seekers.

Our region's career centers coordinate continuously with the MCRWB to improve services, including delivering training through eligible providers. A joint staff team meets bi-monthly to review progress on key goals and measures; our Career Center/Adult Career Pathways Committee uses a regional scorecard (attachment 4) to help the committee review performance, including WIOA adult and dislocated workers going through training. Career center leadership directly oversee the performance of contracted Individual Training Account (ITA) educational providers to ensure positive outcomes.

According to regional standard operating procedures, only WIOA ITA applications that appear on the Statewide List of Eligible Training Service Providers/Courses will be considered by the MCRWB for initial approval locally. The MCRWB has set our local performance measurement criteria in accordance with MA DCS's criteria:

- (a) Quality programs related to in-demand industries and occupations as determined by the Local Board.
- (b) Training programs that lead to industry recognized credentials and certificates.
- (c) Documented performance meeting state minimums: Completion Rate: 70%; Entered Employment Rate: 60%; and Placement Wage: State minimum wage.

Having offered numerous ITA programs, MCRWB and career center staff have determined that training outcomes are substantially improved when ITA students get hands-on, work-based training (internships/externships). We therefore prioritize trainings that provide work-based learning opportunities to ITA eligible customers appropriate for the job opportunities within the training related industry, as well as programs that offer in-person training. The MCRWB will also require the Training Plan development process to have career center staff tell customers that programs featuring externships in the field of training generally have higher job placement rates.

- b. How the Board facilitates access to services provided through the MassHire Career Center(s), including in remote areas, through the use of virtual services, technology and other means.

Our region traditionally tries to identify and use technology where we can on the local level;

these efforts increased during the pandemic. Technology used to help facilitate access to services include:

- Utilizing online Career Center Seminars and job readiness workshops, accessible through job seeker computers, smart phones, or tablets.
- Many career technical trainings were made available online as we transitioned services to a largely digital model during COVID-19. This includes the introduction of an online version of the Bounce work-readiness program, as well as other trainings available through the Goodwill LearnFree and Alison online platforms.
- Adaptive tools: our career centers and WIOA Partners offer customers adaptive tools (physical and digital) to help ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to career center services (e.g., Height Adjustable Tables, ZoomText technology, Assistive Listening Devices, Scanners, Trackball Mouse, Cap Tel Phone, Large Print Keyboards and Large Print Hardcopy Workshop sheets.
- Virtual job fairs on the Premier online platform to connect employers and job seekers.
- Online resume builder for career center customers to create, save and share their work history in an appropriate resume format online through the career center website.
- Job Matching and Computer to Text Communications; as a byproduct of establishing our regional Referral Services Initiative, the career center initiated a review of the current Job Match function at our two regional career centers and has helped lead a development team in establishing a new, more effective and efficient job matching program to better generate job leads for our career center customers which also takes advantage of new technology based staff tools, including the use of “computer to text” messaging by staff to communicate with job seekers via their smart phones.



c. How entities within the MassHire Career Center system, including Career Center Operators and Partners, ensure compliance with WIOA sec. 188 and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) regarding the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs and services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities, including providing

staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities.

As noted above, career centers and WIOA Partners offer customers various adaptive tools to ensure individuals with disabilities get equal access to career services (e.g., Height Adjustable Tables, ZoomText technology, Assistive Listening Devices, Scanners, Trackball Mouse, CapTel Phone, Large Print Keyboards and Large Print Hardcopy Workshop sheets). The availability of these are monitored through the MCRWB's annual review which includes an inspection of the building to ensure adherence to ADA policies and assessment using the Subrecipient and Equal Opportunity Monitoring WIOA Section 188 Review Checklist.

d. The roles and resource contributions of your Partners – please describe how these relationships are sustained and kept productive.

Maintaining productive and positive relationships with partners is always a potential challenge, especially in times of decreasing resources or in unanticipated crises. These challenges include real-world issues that may dampen enthusiasm for collaboration; staff turnover, competing agendas, and perceived threats to authority or “turf” – to name a few.

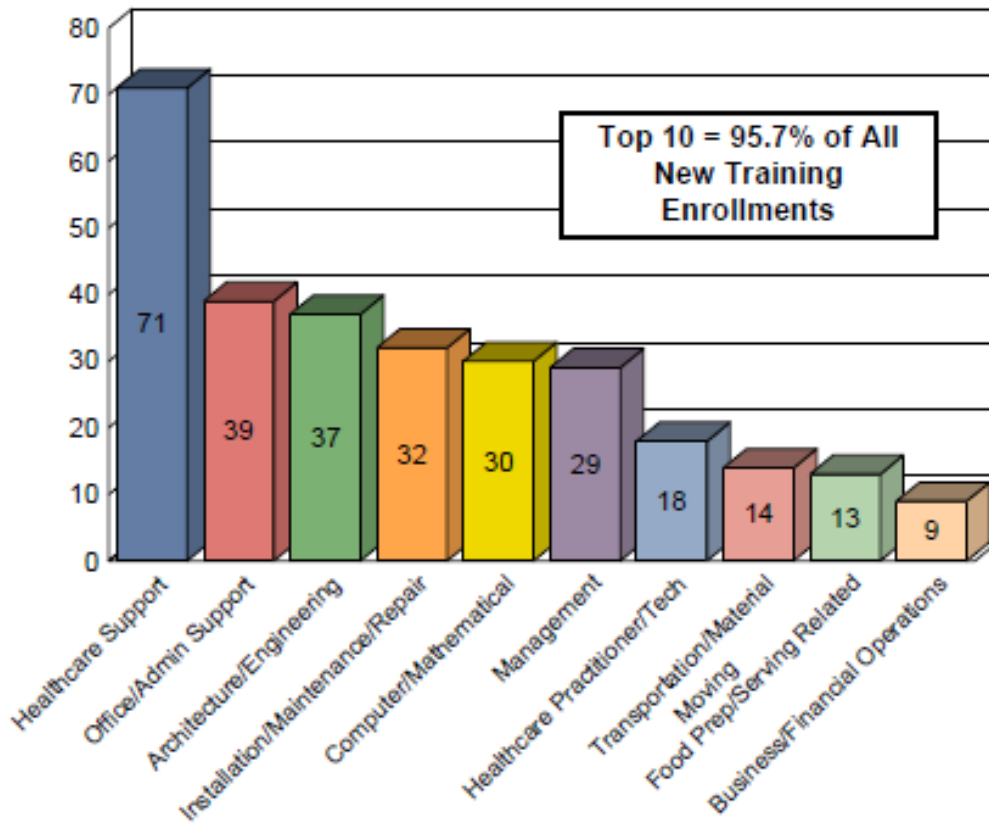
We maintain our partnerships through transparency, ongoing and open communications, and robust relationships that facilitate such communications. Specifically, we hold quarterly WIOA Partner Leadership Council meetings, bi-monthly MCRWB committee meetings and regional MassHire BizWorks meetings, and quarterly MCRWB full board meetings. We use written agreements (MOU/MOA), data tools, and email to keep communications strong and clear. Resource contributions have largely been negotiated on the state level, but local level discussions and planning have complemented these efforts and helped to institutionalize a shared understanding of the value each partner brings to our regional workforce development system.

(6) Please provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of adult and dislocated worker employment and training activities in your local area.

WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker customers at the region's career centers may take advantage of many potential trainings; a review of the training providers listed on the MA JobQuest shows more than 1,100 trainings available, including many locally-based training providers such as QCC, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, MassMEP, the Fieldstone School, and others.

A review of training enrollments for FY25 through March 31, 2025, shows that healthcare, office/admin support, architecture/engineering, and installation/maintenance repair trainings are the most popular enrollments.

**New Training Enrollments: Top 10 Occupational Categories
July 01, 2024 to March 31, 2025**



(7) Please provide a description and assessment of the type and availability of youth workforce investment activities in your area including activities for youth who are individuals with disabilities. Please include an identification of successful models of such activities.

a. Please also provide a description of youth workforce investment activity coordination with the Department of Transitional Assistance, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.

The following programs were approved by the Youth Workforce Investment Council and the MassHire Central Region Workforce Board for FY25. These WIOA Youth programs prioritize an integrated service delivery system that supports qualitative academic and career pathway certificate training programs with attainment of a state recognized credential and positive outcome. The programs approved were the Fieldstone School, LLC; Youth Opportunities Upheld, Inc.; and the Worcester Community Action Council. All vendors offer services to youth with disabilities and integrate them according to relevant regulations and share best practices with each other through the MCRWB YWIC and regional monthly youth vendor meetings.

The WIOA YWIC has representation from the disability community including the Worcester Public Schools Transitions Program, the MA Commission for the Blind, and partner programs that serve youth with disabilities are invited to participate in Youth Workforce Investment Council meetings and activities. Professional development activities related to serving individuals with disabilities include but are not limited to training on mental health first aid, integration of people with disabilities into youth development programs, and an introduction to services available from the MA Rehabilitation Commission.

(8) Please explain how the Board coordinates relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities with education and workforce investment activities to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid duplication of services.

As noted previously, our region utilizes several groups, committees, and workgroups to coordinate relevant secondary and postsecondary education programs and activities with education and workforce investment activities. These include the MCRWB full board, the regional blueprint industry consortia, the Career Center/Adult Career Pathways Committee, the Youth Workforce Investment Council, the WIOA Partner Leadership Council, and the MassHire BizWorks regional team. These groups seek to coordinate strategies, enhance services, and avoid service duplication.

(9) How does the Board coordinate WIOA title I workforce investment activities with the provision of transportation and other appropriate supportive services in the local area? Please include a description of how other programs and services in your local area are leveraged to complement workforce investment activities.

Our region's career centers coordinate WIOA title I workforce investment activities with the provision of transportation and other appropriate supportive services in the local area utilizing resources set aside for support services (including transportation support) for eligible participants identified and served through the career centers. Additionally, customers being served jointly with other WIOA Partners may be referred to transportation and other appropriate support services available through our Partners by initiating a request through our WIOA Partner joint case-management group. The MCRWB has also supported regional transportation planning efforts through the CMRPC, and helped continue WRTA's "no-fare" service.

(10) What plans, assurances, and strategies do you have in place for maximizing coordination, improving service delivery, and avoiding duplication of Wagner-Peyser Act (29 U.S.C. 49 et seq.) services and other services provided through the Career Center delivery system?

As noted previously, the MCRWB has a detailed MOU with WIOA partners to maximize coordination, improve service delivery, and avoid duplicating Wagner-Peyser Act services and other services provided through the region's career centers. We have contracted with a WIOA Operator, Jason Matthews, to coordinate and streamline service delivery among WIOA

partners.

(11) How are career and training services required under WIOA, provided to Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers (MSFWs) through the MassHire Career Center(s)?

Career center staff and regional partners have met with representatives of the Massachusetts Migrant Farm Worker program to discuss resources available to existing or potential agricultural workers and their families. Career center staff have been instructed on how to process job positions from farms seeking harvest workers with skills required for harvesting and maintaining fruit and vegetable crops (H-2A job orders) posted by the Department of Career Services Central office in Boston. Upon receiving an application from the employer, career center staff refer qualified individuals to positions in a timely manner. We recently added the New England Farm Workers Council to our WIOA Partner Leadership Council

(12) Please describe how the Board coordinates WIOA title I workforce investment activities with adult education and literacy activities under WIOA title II. This description must include how the Board carries out the review of local applications submitted under title II consistent with WIOA secs. 107(d)(11)(A) and (B)(i) and WIOA sec. 232:

Each eligible provider desiring a grant or contract from an eligible agency shall apply to the eligible agency containing such information and assurances as the eligible agency may require, including a description of –

- i. how funds awarded under this title will be spent consistent with the requirements of this title;
- ii. any cooperative arrangements the eligible provider has with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of adult education and literacy activities.
- iii. how the eligible provider will provide services in alignment with the local plan under section 108, including how such provider will promote concurrent enrollment in programs and activities under title I, as appropriate.
- iv. how the eligible provider will meet the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3), including how such provider will collect data to report on such performance indicators; 6
- v. how the eligible provider will fulfill Career Center partner responsibilities as described in section 121(b)(1)(A), as appropriate;
- vi. how the eligible provider will provide services in a manner that meets the needs of eligible individuals; and
- vii. information that addresses the considerations described under section 231(e), as applicable.

The MCRWB coordinates with our WIOA Title I Adult Basic Education and Literacy providers through our regional WIOA Partner Leadership Council. A representative of these providers is out-stationed at our career center in Worcester to provide increased access to information about program offerings and opportunities The MCRWB is also represented on the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Adult and Community Learning

Services (ACLS) integrated education and training workforce pathways request for proposal review team and coordinates youth programming regionally with the MCRWB's Youth Workforce Investment Council and Adult Career Pathways committee.

(13) Please provide the name and contact information of your Fiscal Agent.

Ms. Janice Ryan Weekes
 MassHire Worcester Career Center
 554 Main Street; 3rd floor
 Worcester, MA 01608
 (508) 373-7628
 WeekesJ@masshirecentralcc.com

(14) Please describe the competitive process that is used to award the sub grants and contracts for WIOA title I activities.

The MCRWB and our career centers are administrative units of the City of Worcester and follow M.G.L. c. 30B (Chapter 30B) for purchases and awarding sub-grants and contracts for WIOA Title I activities.

(15) Please provide the local levels of performance negotiated with the Governor and chief elected official consistent with WIOA sec. 116(c), to be used to measure the performance of your local area and to be used by the Local Board for measuring the performance of your local fiscal agent (where appropriate), eligible providers under WIOA title I subtitle B, and the Career Center system in the local area.

Local Boards may insert or provide a link to local performance goals. Link must be accessible to ACLS bidders.

Our local FY 2025 performance goals are:

WIOA PERFORMANCE MEASURES	FY 2025Goals
<u>WIOA Adult Measures</u>	
Employment Q2	75.4%
Employment Q4	71.9%
Median Earnings Q2	\$10,986
Credential Rate	68.3%
Measurable Skill Gain	52.4%
<u>WIOA Dislocated Worker Measures</u>	
Employment Q2	77.1%

Employment Q4	78.8%
Median Earnings Q2	\$13,929
Credential Rate	76.4%
Measurable Skill Gain	58%
WIOA Youth Measures	
Employment/Education Q2	78.9%
Employment/Education Q4	69.8%
Median Earnings Q2	\$5,047
Credential Rate	72.3%
Measurable Skill Gain	63.3%

- (16) What are the actions and activities that support the MassHire Board's continued status as a high-performance workforce board?
- a. What trainings are applicable to Board members?
 - b. How do business Board members contribute to workforce development in your region?
 - c. How does your Board support the business services in the career centers?
 - d. To what extent does inter-/intra-Board collaboration result in positive outcomes for job-seekers and businesses?

The MCRWB uses many methods and activities to support and sustain our status as a high performing workforce board. These include one-on-one (or small group) orientations for new board members to ensure they understand their role, the structure and goals of the Commonwealth's workforce system, and annual training on state conflict of interest regulations. Members also receive quarterly updates on MCRWB programming.

MCRWB business members participate in full board and committee meetings, as well as regional planning efforts, to help provide feedback on the needs of local businesses and business trends relevant to the workforce system. They also often participate as partners in career training projects and assists with project design and curriculum development. An example includes recent MCRWB efforts to expand training in information technology. To foster this, an MCRWB member representing an IT employer helped arrange guest speakers to address students at a local high school STEM event, and this employer also helped MCRWB staff identify industry trends and hiring needs to spur potential new training in this field locally.

As noted previously, our region's career centers, in partnership with the MCRWB, have implemented an expanded business services candidate referral process to better serve our

region's businesses. This process includes a redesign of career center staffing to broaden support for the expanded candidate referral process. This redesign was spearheaded by a local private foundation grant received by the board and overseen by a special joint committee, which has now become a continuous improvement group.

The MCRWB is extensively involved with inter-board collaborations. The MCRWB worked closely with colleagues at the MassHire North Central Workforce Board to develop and implement our regional blueprint and is also working closely with these neighbors on the aforementioned MassHire BizWorks regional business support group. We collaborate on several career pathway programs such as a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) training, a manufacturing training grant, and a healthcare training project, as well as regional STEM initiatives, to name a few. In addition, the MCRWB works closely with our board colleagues through the MA Workforce Association to share information on best practices in program administration and delivery, joint project and policy development, and to support shared outreach efforts.

- (17) How are the training services outlined in WIOA sec. 134 provided through the use of individual training accounts? If contracts for training services are or will be used, how is/will the use of such contracts coordinated with the use of individual training accounts?
- a. How does the Board ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are provided?

The MCRWB works closely with our region's career centers to ensure the effective utilization of WIOA resources, including the allocation of training funds through our Individual Training Account (ITA) funding. To this end, the career center has established a process that ensures customer choice while also guiding our members through activities designed to make them informed consumers. This process includes a Training Information Meeting Session (TIMS) to educate potential ITA customers regarding program eligibility and the steps necessary to make an informed and effective choice of training program and vendor. Members then meet with a WIOA staff member to review the eligibility documentation and to guide the labor market research and training program research that must be completed in order to apply for ITA funding support. The member is then guided by their WIOA counselor to complete the necessary training application and enrollment forms and is supported through their enrollment period and post-graduation placement phase to help them maximize their career success. The MCRWB has not yet utilized group/cohort training contracts with vendors but is exploring how to use funds for this purpose when a significant portion of the training may be covered by employer partners in accordance with WIOA regulations.

- (18) Please describe how training services under chapter 3 of subtitle B will be provided in accordance with section 134(c)(3)(G), including, if contracts for the training services will be used, how the use of such contracts will be coordinated with the use of individual training accounts (ITA) under that chapter and how the local board will ensure informed customer choice in the selection of training programs regardless of how the training services are to be provided.

Our region promotes the use of skills training where necessary and appropriate for job seekers to gain the skills needed for gainful employment/re-employment. This includes promotion of strategies with job seekers and employers for On-the-Job Training (OJT), apprenticeship, and trainings available through the use of career center Individual Training Account (ITA) program. The Board ensures robust customer choice is available through the career center training enrollment process which includes the submission of an online interest form, followed by attendance in an information session, completion by the job seeker of labor market information, and finally review and selection of training providers listed on the MassHire Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) managed with providers through the Commonwealth's TrainingPro system.

(19) Please describe the process the Board uses, consistent with WIOA sec. 108(d), to provide up to a 30-day public comment period prior to submission of the plan, including an opportunity to have input into the development of your local plan particularly for representatives of businesses, education, and labor organizations.

This plan has been developed utilizing information and data gathered through our board and committees and our strategic planning process, as well as our regional blueprint development process. Furthermore, we have shared the draft plan via our website, emails and other media to seek public comments from June 23, 2025 through July 24, 2025, and have incorporated these comments where appropriate in this final version.

(20) Describe progress made implementing and transitioning to an integrated, technology-enabled intake, referral, and case management information system for WIOA Partner Shared Customers.

The MCRWB, with our career center leadership, has been researching, studying, and analyzing "best practices" to transition to an integrated, technology-enabled intake and case management information system. MCRWB staff have been deeply involved in a State-led work group that is designing and implementing this effort. Until this is implemented, we are attempting to create a local system that maximizes use of limited technology and funding-- such as creating an online/Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based "career navigator" tool. We have also used the State's PACE online learning platform to offer joint WIOA Partner staff training on topics relevant to shared case management when appropriate.

(21) Please describe the local policy and process that ensures priority for adult career and training services is given to recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient consistent with WIOA sec. 134(c)(3)(E), § 680.600 and 100 DCS 18.101.1.

- Veterans and eligible spouses
- Recipients of public assistance
- Other low-income individuals
- Individuals who are basic skills deficient

The Local Board may establish a process that also gives priority to other individuals eligible to receive such services outside the groups given priority under WIOA, provided that it is consistent with the priority of service for Veterans. Please note the local policy and process must be consistent with WIOA sec. 134(c)(3)(E) and § 680.600.

POS for Veterans: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/priority-of-service-for-veterans>

State Plan: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/fy2020-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-wioa-massachusetts-combined-state-plan/download>

The MCRWB and our region's career centers follow guidance set forth by the Commonwealth related to Priority of Service for adult career and training services for our nation's Veterans and recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient (see attachment 5: SOP for priority of service). The MCRWB and career center staff determine eligibility for their respective programs and services following this policy when identifying access and enrollment.

(22) Please add any additional information or elements, as it pertains to your area and overall strategy, to align with the four Focus Areas outlined in the MA Workforce Agenda that may not have been addressed and responded to via the WIOA Sec 108 4-Year Plan requirements.

Addendum

Massachusetts Workforce Agenda Focus Areas

Building on the MassHire State Workforce Board's vision and mission, the Healey-Driscoll Administration's Workforce Agenda and WIOA State Plan include four focus areas:

Focus Area I: Talent Attraction and Retention For the Commonwealth to be a leader in attracting and retaining talent, Massachusetts must reduce barriers to employment as a critical strategy that will increase labor market participation, especially among underrepresented and underserved populations, and foster a more equitable workforce.

Response: Our region, together with our Regional Workforce Blueprint partners, the MassHire North Central Workforce Board, have sought ways to strengthen our support for populations with barriers to employment. This includes our projects serving returning citizens, people in recovery from addiction, and New Americans.

Focus Area II: Talent Development As Massachusetts invests in talent pipelines and career pathways for residents, it is imperative that workforce strategies align with industry hiring demands expressed by employers today and projected by employers for future in-demand occupations across the state. With the goal of strengthening Massachusetts' talent pipelines, a collaborative workforce system needs to prepare future talent and create upskilling pathways for workers through 8 effective education and training models that will fuel priority industries and occupation.

Response: Our region has emphasized the need for strong employer engagement and demand when establishing/strengthening career pathway training projects, such as bio-manufacturing, Commercial Drivers License (CDL), school bus driver, and Medical Assistant training, etc. In addition, we are exploring emerging industries and occupations, including STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) occupations through the leveraging of public resources such as free community college, YouthWorks youth employment, and School to Career Connecting Activities.

Focus Area III: Leadership by Example Massachusetts has a tremendous opportunity to strengthen and scale effective strategies, programming, and resources to develop untapped talent especially with the Governor and Executive Branch leading by example, and the Commonwealth as the largest employer in Massachusetts.

Response: We are active partners with State initiatives to lead by example to strengthen and scale effective strategies. These include our work with the MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the MassHire Department of Career Services, and the MA Workforce Association to identify and pilot new programs, procedures, and tools, and to share best practices throughout our system.

Focus Area IV: Workforce System Infrastructure Massachusetts needs to modernize and strengthen the infrastructure and coordination across the MassHire public workforce system to improve support for jobseekers and employers. Additionally, as the MassHire State Workforce Board serves as a convening body to influence and support Massachusetts' Workforce Agenda, the Board should also ensure alignment as a resource for the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to engage Board members, regional workforce partners, and more.

Response: The MCRWB and our career centers have (and will continue) to serve as thought partners on identifying ways we can modernize and strengthen our infrastructure and coordination across the MassHire public workforce system. This includes our work on the State's Information Technology and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion working groups, and our promotion of new technology-based staff tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) based tools and services.

Central Massachusetts Regional Workforce Blueprint

2023-2027



**CENTRAL REGION
WORKFORCE BOARD**



**NORTH CENTRAL
WORKFORCE BOARD**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Regional Planning Process and Data	3
Critical Trends	12
Regional Workforce Priorities	16
Top Regional Challenges	17
Broad Labor Supply Challenges	18
Existing Pipeline and Education	20
Vision, Mission and Goals	28
How Do We Get There	30

The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed into law on July 22, 2014, and is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in fifteen years. WIOA supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and retains and amends the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, the Wagner-Peyser Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and establishes the publicly-funded national network of Federal, State, regional, and local agencies and organizations that provide a range of employment, education, training, and related services and supports to help all jobseekers secure good jobs while providing businesses with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

Among other requirements, WIOA calls for local regions to develop strategies and shared service models among the federally funded partners, including:

- **The Adult Program (Title I of WIOA)**, as part of the Department of Career Services (DCS), Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD);
- **The Dislocated Worker Program (Title I)**, as part of the Department of Career Services (DCS), EOLWD.
- **Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs** (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.)), as part of DCS, EOLWD.
- **Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program** (Programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.) as part of DCS, EOLWD.
- **The Wagner-Peyser Act Program** (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III), as part of DCS, EOLWD.
- **The Youth Program** (Title I), as part of the Department of Career Services (DCS), EOLWD.
- **The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program** (Title II), as part of Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Executive Office of Education (EOE).
- **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV), as part of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).
- **Federal—state unemployment compensation program**, as part of the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), EOLWD.
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program** (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) as part of Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), EOHHS.
- **Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**, (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C.2015(d)(4))), as part of DTA, EOHHS and
- **Senior Community Service Employment Program** (Programs

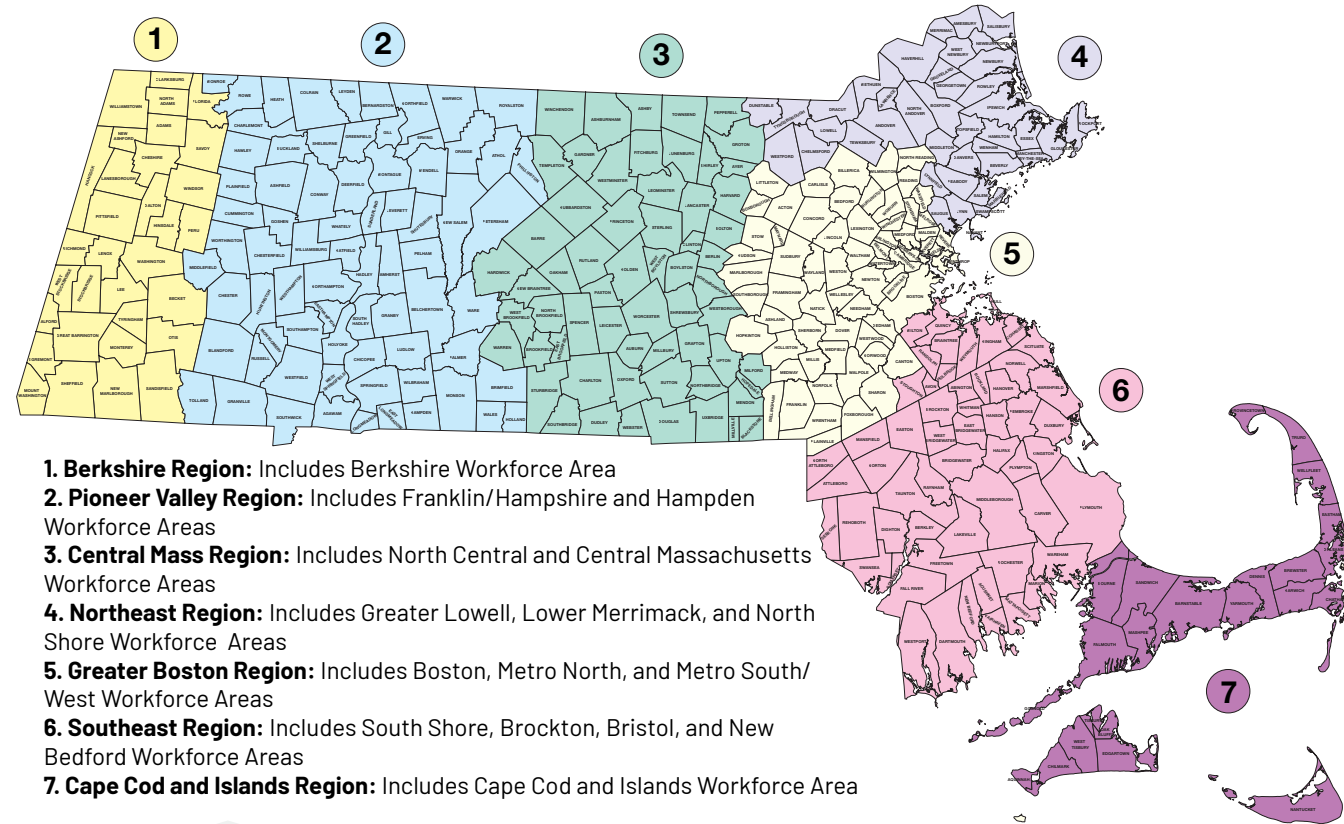
authorized under title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.)), as part of the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA). To accomplish this, local Workforce Development Boards have convened their local partner representatives to establish a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing service referrals and delivery, data sharing procedures, Career Center operations, and career pathway supports.

As part of WIOA, the Governor of each State is required to submit a Unified or Combined State Plan to the U.S. Secretary of Labor that outlines a four-year workforce development strategy for the State's workforce development system. As detailed in the Commonwealth's WIOA State Plan, the Baker Administration has launched several initiatives to better coordinate the broadly defined workforce system with the needs of business as well as focus on expanding the impact on job outcomes for individuals with barriers to employment. One of these initiatives is the Workforce Skills Cabinet, which was created to align the resources of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, the Executive Office of Education and the Executive Office of Housing and Development – the State agencies that administer the major federal and state programs for job seekers and employers.

Through the Workforce Skills Cabinet, the Commonwealth has established a regional planning process to align the priorities of each region for the agencies within the Workforce Skills Cabinet's four secretariats. In this way, the Commonwealth is utilizing the required WIOA Regional Planning process to create this new, integrated

continued on next page

THE WORKFORCE SKILLS CABINET COMBINED THE COMMONWEALTH'S 16 WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT REGIONS INTO SEVEN WORKFORCE SKILLS CABINET PLANNING REGIONS:



- 1. Berkshire Region:** Includes Berkshire Workforce Area
- 2. Pioneer Valley Region:** Includes Franklin/Hampshire and Hampden Workforce Areas
- 3. Central Mass Region:** Includes North Central and Central Massachusetts Workforce Areas
- 4. Northeast Region:** Includes Greater Lowell, Lower Merrimack, and North Shore Workforce Areas
- 5. Greater Boston Region:** Includes Boston, Metro North, and Metro South/West Workforce Areas
- 6. Southeast Region:** Includes South Shore, Brockton, Bristol, and New Bedford Workforce Areas
- 7. Cape Cod and Islands Region:** Includes Cape Cod and Islands Workforce Area

Specifically, the goals of each region are to:

- Identify the growing industries and occupations to be prioritized by system partners that will assist in the economic growth of the region.
- Develop a joint set of action steps to address skills gaps within these industries/occupations.
- Align and drive programming and service delivery across the three secretariats to meet the needs of the priority industries/occupations.
- Help more residents gain the credentials, education and job skills needed for successful careers within high-demand career pipelines.

continued from previous page

regional planning process across the economic, education and workforce Secretariats.

On a regional basis, this process seeks to scale up regional workforce development models that provide workers with the skills employer's demand. The process is designed to ensure that regional employers, educators, and workforce training officials are coordinated in a way that creates strong talent pipelines for in-demand jobs.

The purpose of the regional planning under the Workforce Skills Cabinet and WIOA is to use the same regional boundaries between economic development, workforce, education, and key partners. Each region has therefore been asked to identify business demand for skills, create regional strategies, and

align existing resources to this process. The goal is to ensure that regional employers, educators, and workforce training officials are coordinated in a way that creates strong talent pipelines, for both middle-skilled and highly skilled jobs. The regional planning will support the development of cross-secretariat partnerships formed to support sector initiatives/career pathway initiatives that includes education and training, credential attainment, work-based learning (OJTs or apprenticeships), etc.

Local Workforce Development Boards (working as multi-region partners) have been tasked with convening regional leaders in partnership with education and economic development partners to coordinate strategic workforce priorities, activities, and performance metrics.



THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS WERE INVITED TO BE A PART OF THE REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS:

Joshua Froimson
Manager, Business Excellence
AbbVie

Kerrie Salwa
Executive Director
Central MA Regional Planning
Commission

Deb Murphy
Program Manager
Central MA Workforce Investment Board

Jeffrey Turgeon
Executive Director
Central MA Workforce Board

Jeannie Hebert
President and CEO
Central Regional EDA Partnership

Mary Jo Bohart
Director, Economic Development
City of Fitchburg

Jessica DeRoy
Economic Development Coordinator
City of Gardner

Amanda Curtis
Economic Development Coordinator
City of Leominster

Sue Mailman
President
Coughlin Electrical Contractors

Jenna Tait
Contract Manager, Employment Services
Program
Department of Transitional Assistance-
Fitchburg

Joyce Clemence
Director, Southbridge Office
Department of Transitional Assistance-
Worcester

Jason Fitz
Director
Worcester County Sheriff's Department

Kevin Kuros
Senior Director, Business Development
Mass. Office of Business Development

Glenn Eaton
Executive Director
Montachusett Regional Planning
Commission

Arianna Drummy
Director
Worcester Jobs Fund

Adam Duggan
Vice President, Lifelong Learning and
Workforce Development
Mount Wachusett Community College

Trish Woodliff
Director of Adult Learning
Montachusett Regional Technical School

Kevin Gaugush
Chief People Officer
Advantage Truck Group

Roy Nascimento
President and CEO
North Central MA Chamber of Commerce

Penny Doolittle
Market Maker
Central MA Workforce Board

Jeff Roberge
Executive Director
North Central MA Workforce Board

Paul Morano
Assistant Chief Development Officer –
Business and Community Development
City of Worcester, Executive Office of
Economic Development

Kathy Manning
VP of Adult Learning
Quinsigamond Community College

Robin Hooper
Community Life Senior Manager
The Community Builders, Inc.

Janice Ryan-Weekes
Director
Worcester Career Center

Staci Johnson
Director
North Central Career Center

Kelly Aiken
Director
UMass Memorial Health

Karen Pelletier
Director of Higher Ed-Business
Partnership
Worcester Regional Chamber of
Commerce

Christine Cordio
Director
Clinton ABE

Paul Gilbody
CEO
Milford Federal Credit Union

Rebecca Marois
President
Greater Gardner Chamber of Commerce

John Person
Area Director
Massachusetts Rehabilitation
Commission



DESCRIPTION OF THE REGIONAL PLANNING PROCESS:

As noted previously, the Central MA region consists of the Central MA and North Central MA Workforce Development Areas. The two local workforce development boards, the MassHire Central MA Workforce Board (MCM-WB) and the MassHire North Central MA Workforce Board (MNCWB), have fully embraced the concept of collaborative regional workforce planning and have assembled a strong and diverse team of stakeholder representatives from private industry, education, workforce development, and economic development. The region has conducted planning sessions since the start of the planning process and during these sessions the stakeholders have reviewed regional population demographics, labor market information, and the additional data necessary to confirm industry priorities and supply gaps in our region, including the results of a survey conducted specifically for distribution to the *Worcester Business Journal* circulation audience. This survey was sent to the entire Worcester Business Journal audience of key decision makers and top executives in the region. The data was collected during the months of November and December of 2023.

Approximately 350 business leaders responded to the survey, yielding

detailed information regarding their priorities, challenges, and needs. Brad Kane, the editor of the *Worcester Business Journal* categorized the results as mostly positive (see chart A) about our Central Massachusetts economy with several key data points that relate to our strategic blueprint overarching assertions.

According to Brad Kane, “Workforce issues remain top of mind, as 65% expect to hire ADDITIONAL STAFF

next year (see chart A), but 51% are concerned they will not be able to find the right people with the right skills for the job (see chart B). More than a fifth of the survey takers said the biggest impediment to business growth is a lack of available workforce (22%). (see chart C).

For the last few years Central Massachusetts companies have given greater attention to their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives. (see chart D).

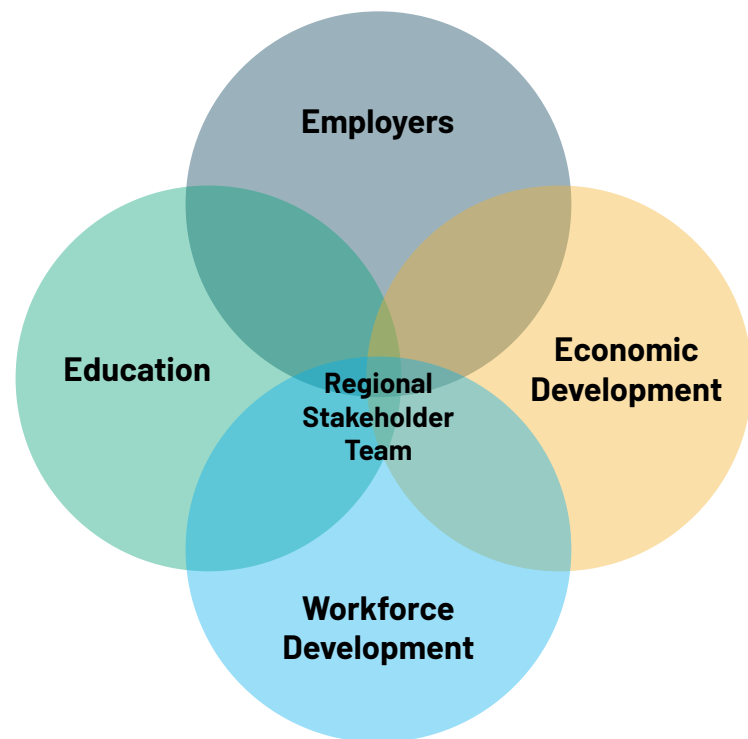


Chart A

Do you plan to hire additional staff next year?

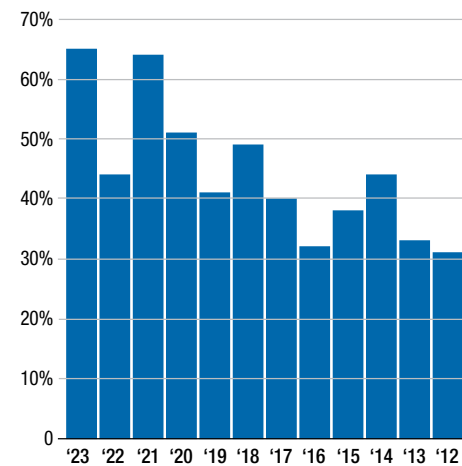


Chart B

How concerned are you that you'll be able to find people with the right skills for when you hire for any job openings?

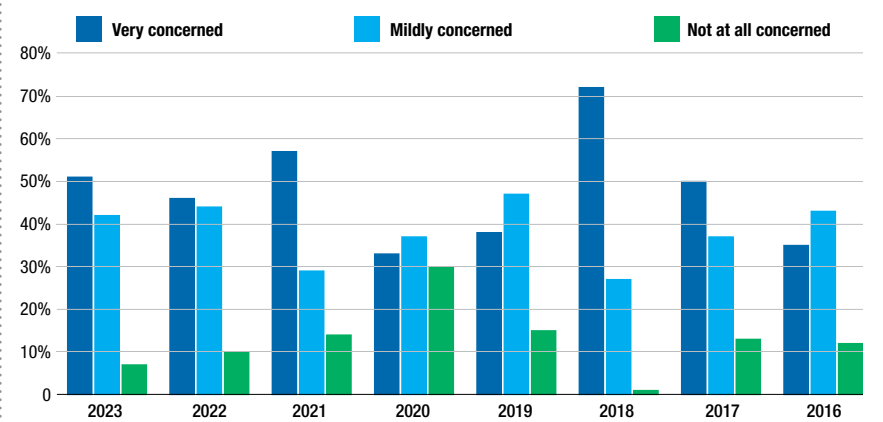
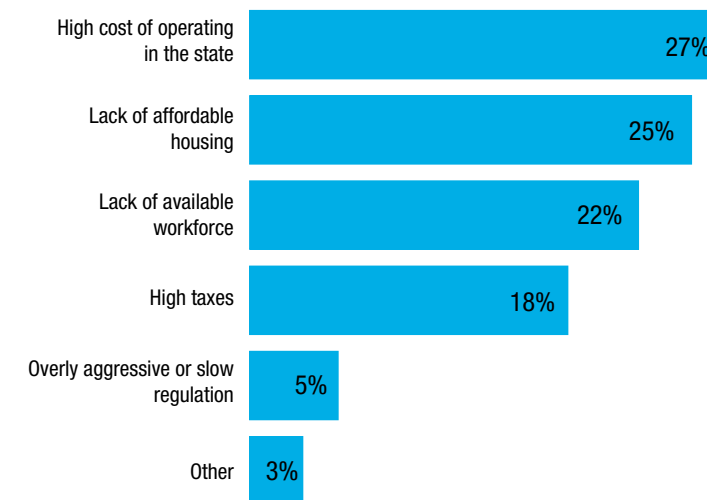


Chart C

What's the biggest impediment to business growth in Massachusetts?

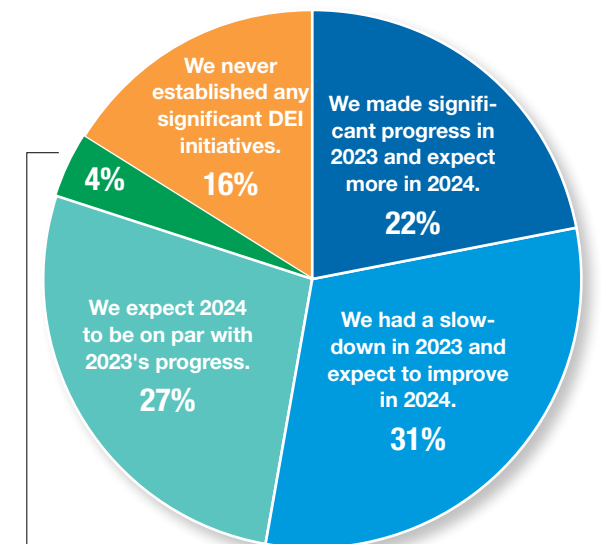


Other answers:

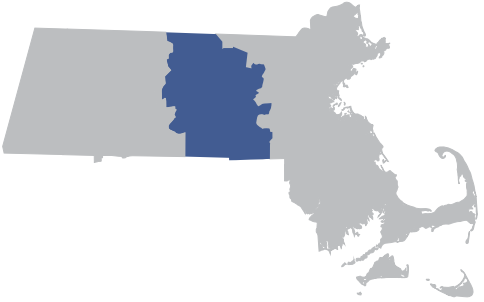
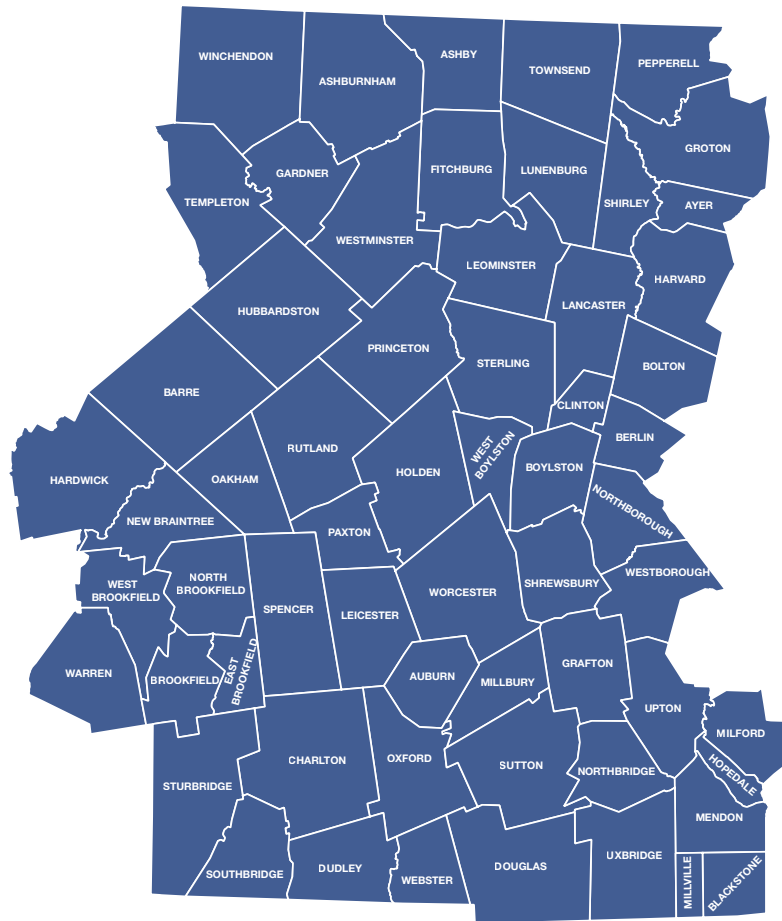
- High utility costs & high interest rates (access to capital)
- Globalization
- Irresponsible leadership for the past 10-12 years
- Uncertainty, leading to cautious investment

Chart D

For the last few years, a number of companies have given greater attention to their diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. If your company does have DEI goals, how much progress do you anticipate in making toward those goals in 2024?



Our DEI efforts regressed in 2023, and we don't expect them to rebound.



DESCRIPTION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF OUR REGION:

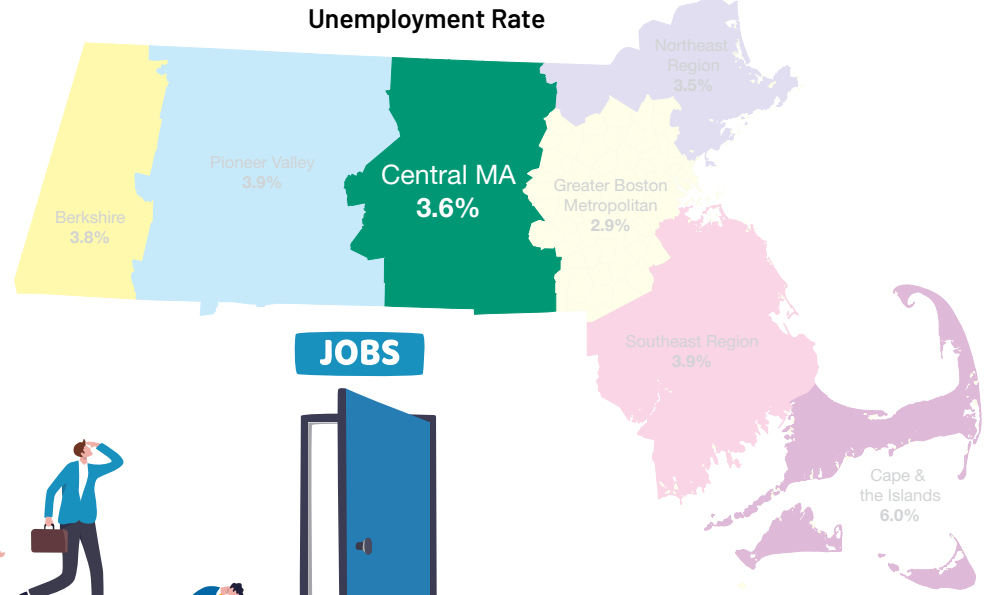
The Central MA region consists of 61 communities, anchored by New England’s second largest city, Worcester, as well the twin cities of Fitchburg and Leominster. The region borders three other regional labor markets: Pioneer Valley, Northeast, and Metro South/ West. The total population of the two regions is 980,161 with a labor force of 437,249. The region boasts of natural attractions such as Mount Wachusett, Lake Quinsigamond, and Purgatory Chasm, as well as historic sites dating back to the local Native American tribes and prominent locations from the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and later, the Industrial Revolution.

Our region also features prominently as a bellwether for the US economy, being built upon agriculture at the start of our nation and then moving during the industrial age to become a major force in development of machine-powered manufacturing through the start of the 20th century centered around the abundant water power of our rivers and streams. This rise in manufacturing, however, has given way to other industries over the past fifty years. Healthcare, retail, and human services have grown to take a larger role as manufacturing, especially traditional manufacturing, has faded. In the recent past, state, and local officials have made a concerted effort to invest in the life-sciences industry and have had success in attracting biotech/biomedical companies to the region and supporting the growth of new life-science firms.

In terms of employment rates, the Central MA region continues to mirror the state as a whole economically; our

COMMUNITIES IN CENTRAL MA

- Ashburnham
- Ashby
- Auburn
- Ayer
- Barre
- Berlin
- Blackstone
- Bolton
- Boylston
- Brookfield
- Charlton
- Clinton
- Douglas
- Dudley
- East Brookfield
- Fitchburg
- Gardner
- Grafton
- Groton
- Hardwick
- Harvard
- Holden
- Hopedale
- Hubbardston
- Lancaster
- Leicester
- Leominster
- Lunenburg
- Mendon
- Milford
- Millbury
- Millville
- New Braintree
- North Brookfield
- Northborough
- Northbridge
- Oakham
- Oxford
- Paxton
- Pepperell
- Princeton
- Rutland
- Shirley
- Shrewsbury
- Southbridge
- Spencer
- Sterling
- Sturbridge
- Sutton
- Templeton
- Townsend
- Upton
- Uxbridge
- Warren
- Webster
- West Boylston
- West Brookfield
- Westborough
- Westminister
- Winchendon
- Worcester

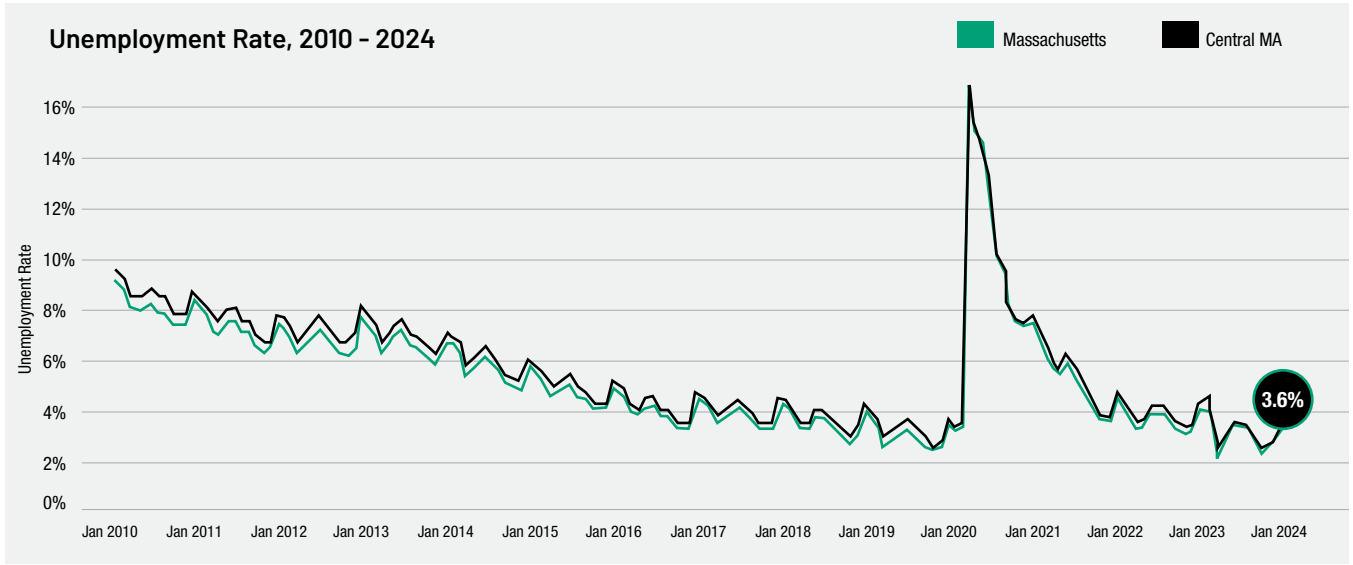


region’s unemployment rate hovers around 3.6% — a low rate by historical standards.

This low rate, however, masks some of the challenges our region’s workforce faces. First, this low rate indicates that many residents in the region actively seeking work are able to find it – making the labor market for these workers more competitive and therefore

harder for employers to find candidates without raising wages. But there are additional challenges associated with this data that are less obvious. This includes the fact that the official unemployment rate as announced by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the “U-3” rate, only includes those who are in the labor force and actively looking for work within the previous four weeks. If a person is unemployed and was looking for work in the last year, but not in the past four

continued on next page



continued from previous page

weeks, the individual is considered a “discouraged worker” by the BLS, and not counted in the U-3 rate. If you were to broaden the U-3 measure to count these discouraged workers (plus those working part time who wish full-time work) as the BLS does in its U-6 measure, the unemployment rate in Central Massachusetts climbs to 6.0%, double the statewide U-3 rate of 3.0%. Yet even this statistic, as broad as it is, only includes those who have looked for work in the past year. If you were to measure those who have given up looking for work for more than one year, the statistic no doubt climbs much higher still — but it is difficult to measure since this population, being much harder to define from available data, is not tracked by the BLS and has thus been largely made invisible in official statistics.

UI CLAIMANT POPULATION AND THE REGION’S LARGEST SUPPLY OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS BY JOB TYPE:

A review of the UI Claimant reports for December 2023 shows that there were 7,541 claimants for the region and the average weekly wage claim was \$1092.39. Of these claimants, 5.8% were between ages 20-24, 22.8% were ages 25-34, 23.1% were ages 35-44, 19.3% were ages 45-54, and 19.6% were ages 55-64.

In terms of occupational backgrounds:

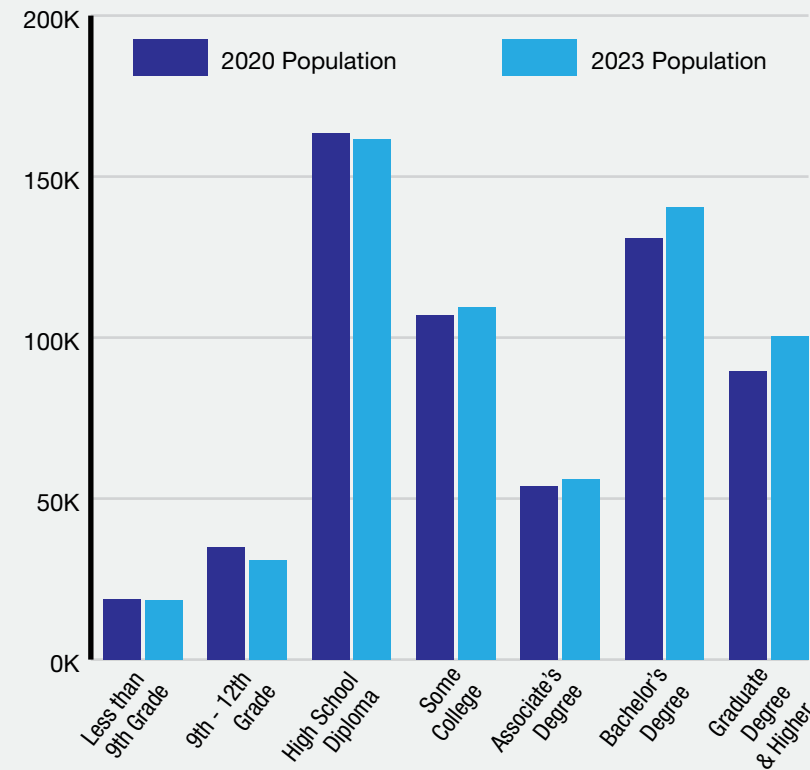
- 1,059 had Management backgrounds
- 1,106 had Construction and Extraction backgrounds
- 653 had Office and Administrative Support backgrounds
- 661 had Building and Grounds Maintenance backgrounds
- 406 had Production backgrounds

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Although our region boasts many education and training providers, the fact remains that far too many of our region’s residents, especially those for people of color, are not able to reach the

first rung of the career ladder and need additional education. This includes the development of additional ABE and ESOL programming aligned with regional employer demand to help prepare our most vulnerable residents gain entry level employment and set the foundation for continued career training and academic coursework.

Educational Attainment by Level



Education Level	2020 Population	2023 Population	2020 % of Population	2020 State % Population	2020 National Population
Less Than 9th Grade	18,785	18,333	3%	4%	5%
9th - 12th Grade	34,844	30,852	6%	5%	7%
High School Diploma	163,598	161,686	27%	24%	27%
Some College	106,968	109,500	18%	15%	20%
Associate's Degree	53,963	56,143	9%	8%	9%
Bachelor's Degree	130,856	140,504	22%	24%	20%
Graduate Degree & Higher	89,531	100,345	15%	20%	13%
	598,545	617,363	100%	100%	100%

Source: Educational Attainment Snapshot, Lightcast



Critical Trends



CRITICAL TRENDS IN REGIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS THAT IMPACT THE WORKFORCE:

The planning team has identified two demographic trends in our region that have a significant impact on our workforce as we move forward. The first is our aging population which is already having an impact in several industries, including manufacturing and other “traditional” trades. Many of the older, more experienced workers are retiring and this is leaving gaps that are proving difficult for employers to fill as younger workers are not choosing to enter these fields in numbers sufficient to meet the need. For example, there are a sizable number of maintenance mechanics and machine operator positions that will be available as the current workforce retires in the next 3-5 years. Without new candidates to replace these workers, the shortage will grow critical, jeopardizing the ability of these companies to meet customer demand, let alone growth opportunities they would need to forgo. Similarly, diesel technicians, construction workers, and other skilled trades appear to be of less interest to many youths. Some have argued that youth are counseled from an early age that a college degree offers them a better career path, and thus look to go that route instead of a hands-on

Changing demographics in the population will have far-reaching effects on the labor force, the economy, and employment over the 2016–26 decade. The overall labor force participation rate is projected to decline as older workers leave the labor force, constraining economic growth. The aging baby-boomer segment of the population will drive demand for healthcare services and related occupations.

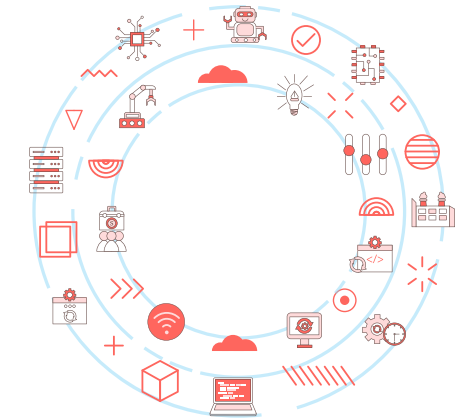
– US BLS; Projections overview and highlights, 2016–26

profession that is not aligned with the degree-track academic system. Beyond this, many youths seek jobs that offer more social rewards, aka, a higher level of esteem, since society seems to devalue income derived from physical labor. In general, support for a stronger alignment of employer needs with secondary and post-secondary education and training providers is needed, including expanded career exposure, work-based learning, and career technical training for our emerging workforce.

A corollary issue we are seeing with an aging workforce is that many older workers do not appear to be equipped with the appropriate skill set to work in a technology-rich workplace, such as advanced manufacturing. For instance, many older workers/job seekers are not familiar with Computer-Numeric Control (CNC) machining, which is becoming the norm within the manufacturing industry. CNC machining is an automated process and requires knowledge of software and programming. While we have already completed a large amount of CNC training in our region, we will need to do more to upskill our aging existing workers and prepare our younger workforce.

A further issue related to our aging population is the need it will bring for increased medical care and other social services as the population moves into the post-retirement stage of life. This demographic shift will significantly impact many of our region’s larger industry sectors, such as healthcare and the level of staff necessary to care for our region’s seniors.

The second critical trend we are seeing is growth of our immigrant and refugee populations. While these new Americans bring the potential to fill many supply gaps in our priority industries, they also often present with more potential barriers to employment. Some of the barriers we are already seeing include a lack of English language proficiency, limited education beyond high school (or credentials that do not transfer here from their previous countries), and a lack of job-specific skills. It has been reported that the waiting list for our region for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes is greater than 1,000 candidates. These people’s lives are on hold as their ability to work in living-wage jobs is significantly impaired by their lack of English fluency.



PAST AND CURRENT HIGH-LEVEL INDUSTRY TRENDS IMPACTING WORKFORCE NEEDS:

There are numerous high level industry trends occurring in our region that are impacting workforce needs, such as the rise of technology and automation, changes to business operations and management practices, issues involving the “pay squeeze” for some industries, and employer responses to public policy changes.

Increase in technology and automation

Increasing technology has been a major driving trend in our region, like others throughout the Commonwealth and beyond. Technology has always impacted workforce in a variety of ways and continues to do so today. In the past, modern technology such as the harnessing of electricity provided power to factories and freed them from the need to be near the rivers which drove the machinery. Gas motors forever changed the way we transport goods and materials – and changing the mix of workers needed to build and maintain the new automobiles and trucks, and the roads they ride on. Today, we see the rise of automated manufacturing, self-checkout kiosks in markets and gas stations, and now the growth of the “gig economy” made possible using real-time online platforms. This rise

It is well understood that in order to foster strong economic growth in the future, the Central MA region needs to align the education of its labor force to meet the demands of the region’s employers. The higher education institutions in the region can play a key role in influencing the future supply of workers with post-secondary degrees. This supply will be critical to help meet the demographic challenges posed by the aging workforce and the increasing demand for educated workers.

– Labor Market Trends in Massachusetts Regions: Central Mass; Boston Federal Reserve

continued on next page

continued from previous page

in technology has reduced the need for employees doing lower-level, repetitive functions, and so, teen employment has dropped as a result. The gig-economy allows people the freedom to choose when and how they wish to offer their services, but the work comes with little or no benefits, job security, or growth potential – an Uber driver is unlikely to advance up the company ranks. In Information Technology, project-based gig work may be well paying, but comes with the stress of not knowing what work may be available in the future, and workers are increasingly competing with talent based overseas since production can be shared seamlessly over the world-wide web.

Automation in the manufacturing sector is creating greater efficiencies for manufacturers and yielding ever-higher productivity as companies can produce more goods with less workers, leading to layoffs in this industry. Unfortunately for employers, they are in a race with a generational shift as older workers begin to retire in greater numbers, overwhelming their ability to replace these aging workers with machines. And the jobs that remain in advanced manufacturing require ever more comfort with the use of computers to interface with the new machines on the shop floor. Our vocational-technical high schools are already attempting to address this need by adding programs in engineering, advanced manufacturing, and robotics, but not at a high enough scale to prepare the number of workers necessary to replace the existing workforce preparing to retire. Further, a considerable number of the students attending these schools are going off to college after graduation, and not directly entering into the local and regional workforce.

In the transportation industry there has been significant research on the development of autonomous (so called driver-less) vehicles and discussion in the workforce development world regarding the disruption this will have

upon employment as drivers. Discussions with local distribution industry professionals indicate that this innovation is many years away from having an impact locally – while the technology may be rapidly advancing, the prohibitive cost of buying and maintaining an autonomous delivery truck will prevent wide scale implementation and any noticeable decline in local jobs driving. More imminent, these professionals suggest, is the greater utilization of automation in the sorting, handling, and preparation of products as they move through the distribution network. Beyond the short term, it is anticipated that delivery trucks, even autonomous ones, will still need a human presence on board for the foreseeable future to ensure the safe handling and delivery of goods and material.

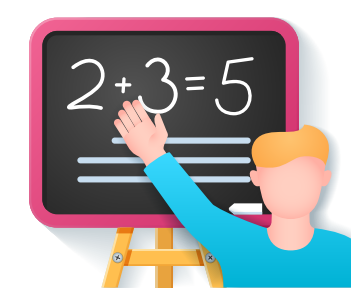
Changes to business operations and management practices

Another high-level industry trend that is affecting workforce development is the changing management structures that businesses utilize, such as the rise of outsourcing for much non-core business administrative and support services like human resources, payroll processing, marketing, custodial/janitorial services, etc. Businesses have also turned to the use of third-party temporary firms to fill short term employment needs or for greater screening for “permanent” status as a company employee. Businesses have increasingly turned to these alternate organizational models to achieve greater efficiency, however, they have also had some unintended consequences, including a lowering of business reputations in the community-labor pool, and a decrease in the ability to promote from within as talented entry level support staff learn about the business and further advance their careers through company-sponsored education and professional development.

Pay-Squeeze

Another trend in our region is the

trend whereby employers have been caught in a “pay squeeze” affecting their ability to pay workers more in times of greater employer demand; unfortunately, we are seeing across some of our priority industries such as manufacturing, health care and social assistance that salaries are not increasing at a rate keeping up with the demand (for instance, manufacturing saw a 2.95% increase in total wages over the past 10 year period and health care an increase of 4.99% total wages, both below the regional average for all industries of 7.82% and far lower than the increased hiring demand would anticipate). One likely reason for this is that while the Commonwealth has increased minimum wage over the past three years, the ability of the employers to pay their workers a higher wage relative to the minimum wage is being capped by the funding available on the revenue side. In health care, this is a result of a public reimbursement system that caps the rate of funding and therefore leaves the revenue side flat while employers in other industries around them (including fast food and retail) have increased their pay due to the minimum wage mandate. This is also occurring in child development centers where staff pay rates are highly dependent on the public voucher supports available to the Centers for the moderate and low-income families they serve. Without a rise in the voucher rates, paying staff more is a difficult proposition. Similarly, local manufacturers have faced pressure from their customers to meet the prices of their competitors, many of which are in countries with much lower pay rates, such as China. This pay-cap issue therefore alters the natural labor-market and the increase in pay expected in order to entice more people to seek employment in that field – especially if the work requires an investment in a potential candidate’s time and money for training in order to be qualified for the job(s) available. This, in and of itself, has large implications for the public workforce system, as it suggests increased training alone may



not be sufficient to meet the demand.

Employer Responses to Public Policy

As noted previously, the Commonwealth’s increase in the minimum wage has fostered changes in the labor-market at the lower end of the pay scale. Employers in numerous sectors that pay at or slightly above minimum wage have had to adjust their budgets to accommodate the rise in hourly staff pay. For some, this has not appeared to have been a major burden as slight increases in product prices have offset the additional labor costs.

Another operational trend we have identified is that costs to employers for health insurance continue to climb and this trend is not anticipated to change any time soon. At the Federal level, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) appears to be slowly being dismantled and the actual coverage for services is declining. Our smallest employers often cannot afford to offer health insurance to their employees. Massachusetts law allows employers of fewer than 50 full-time equivalent positions to choose whether to offer health insurance. Since our region has many small companies – in fact, the average number of employees per company is just below 38 – workers in our region often must purchase health insurance through the Massachusetts Health Connector at their own cost. The rising cost of health care puts upward pressure on insurance premiums. In response, employers and health plans try to limit premium increases using strategies such as offering more high-deductible plans and increasing co-payments, co-insurance, and out-of-

pocket maximums. These approaches represent a cost shift from insurers and employers to workers and further complicate the labor market as workers fear the loss of employer-sponsored health insurance and employers must decide how to meet the rising costs.

CRITICAL TRENDS IN OCCUPATIONAL EMPLOYMENT HISTORY IN THE REGION:

Shifting of the region’s Industry/ Occupational Mix

As noted previously, the industrial base of the Central MA region has shifted the past several decades from a manufacturing focused economy to one that is more balanced between industry sectors, including healthcare, education, professional services, and retail. While this shift has meant less dependency upon a single industry sector, it has also meant the loss of many family-supporting wage jobs for those with limited formal education.

There continues to be a rising need for health care workers at most levels of clinical services and at a variety of health care providers, including community health centers and patient triage clinics, long term care facilities, and hospitals. According to the MA Department of Economic Research, the projected employment in Health Care and Social Assistance from 2020 to 2030 in our combined Central MA region will rise by nearly 10,000 positions – from 69,997 employees to 79,584. Similarly, retail employment is

expected to grow by 3,049 from 35619 to 38,668 across the region. During this same timeframe, educational services (including teachers and teacher assistants) are anticipated to grow by 3,548 employees.

One sector we are seeing a significant rise in is the life sciences sector (an anticipated gain of more than 1,700 employees). Fortunately, with four public institutions of higher education in our region offering training/education to prepare people for careers at various levels of this growing sector, we are well positioned to take advantage of this opportunity.



TOP 3 REGIONAL WORKFORCE PRIORITY INDUSTRIES:

Based upon the State criteria and regional criteria set by the planning team the following industries were deemed priority industries for the region:

<p>Healthcare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNA/PCA (inc. EKG and phlebotomy) • LPN – RN • Pharm. Tech • Medical Asst • Direct care workers • Medication technician • CHW/patient navigator • Clinical behavioral health staff – licensed mental health counselor • Technologists – surgical techs; Radiology techs, respiratory techs, Medical Lab techs • Medical interpreters 	<p>Manufacturing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CNC Machinists • Quality Control Techs • Production Workers <p>New:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robotic – Machine Techs & instrument/calibration technicians • Photonics • Biotechnology (formerly within professional services) 	<p>Transportation/Logistics/Warehousing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CDL Drivers • Diesel Technicians <p>New:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities Maintenance mechanics
--	--	---

Additionally, the following industries were identified as critical industries for our region:

<p>Professional and Tech Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational Groups: Software/ Web Developer, Cyber Security • Anticipated growth of STEM fields, including IT and life sciences • High average wage sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Web Developer: \$59.9K – Biomanufacturing: \$44.9K 	<p>Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupational Group: HVAC Mechanics, Apprenticeship Trade Occupations • High employer need, low education barriers, large pool of candidates • Strong wages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – HVAC: \$55K – Building Trades: \$52.7K 	<p>Retail/Hospitality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combined, these two sectors for the region's 2nd largest employment sector (19.5%) • Low educational barriers, multiple industry pathways 	<p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region's 3rd largest employment sector (12.7%) • Strong wages with average sector wage at \$64K
---	--	---	--

INDUSTRIES CURRENTLY FACING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES:

The planning team has identified Healthcare & Social Assistance, Manufacturing, and Transportation, Warehousing, and Logistics as facing the most significant workforce development challenges, followed by the critical industries identified on the previous page, Professional and Technical Services, Construction, Retail/Hospitality, and Education.

TOP THREE CHALLENGES FACING THE REGION'S BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRY OVER THE NEXT FOUR YEARS:

A survey of Worcester Business Journal audience results of local businesses helped identify the top challenges facing employers regionally. Overwhelmingly, employers identified finding and retaining talent as one of their top three challenges, with high operating costs and lack of affordable housing (see chart C on page 7). Overwhelmingly the survey reiterates the “very” concerned response as the highest percentage among respondents who could also reply “mildly” concerned or “not at all” concerned when it comes to employer’s confidence. Matching with the right people with the right skills when there is a job opening is top of mind (see chart B on page 7). Our regional blueprint survey data and research supports within the challenge of finding and retaining talent, the most significant factors involved included the aging of our workforce, lack of work-readiness/social-emotional skills, and barriers to employment such as English language competency, unreliable transportation, criminal background concerns, and substance abuse.

THE TOP OCCUPATIONS OR OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS IN WHICH THE REGION IS FACING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EMPLOYEE SHORTAGES:

The top occupational groups in which the region is facing the most significant employee shortages are:

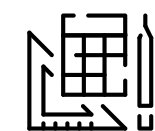
OCCUPATIONAL GROUP 1: Health Occupations

• Certified Nursing Assistant, LPN, RN, Pharmacy Tech, Direct Care Worker, Medical Assistants, Direct care workers, Medication Technician, Community Health Worker/Patient Navigator, Medical Interpreters, clinical behavioral health staff – licensed mental health counselors, and technologists – including Surgical Technicians; Radiology Technicians, Respiratory Technicians, and Medical Lab Technicians.



OCCUPATIONAL GROUP 2: Manufacturing Occupations

• CNC Machinist, Quality Control Technicians, Production Workers, Robotics - Instrument/calibration technicians, life-science, and photonics production staff



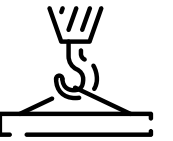
OCCUPATION GROUP 3: Transportation, Warehousing and Logistics Occupations

• Commercial Drivers; Diesel Technicians; Industrial Maintenance Mechanics



OCCUPATIONAL GROUP 4: Construction Occupations

• Apprenticeship Trade Occupations, HVAC Mechanics, energy efficiency technicians



OCCUPATIONAL GROUP 5: Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services Occupations

• Software/Web Developer, Cyber Security



OCCUPATIONS OFFERING A “CAREER PATHWAY” FOR WORKERS TO MOVE TO HIGHER SKILLS AND WAGES, ESPECIALLY WORKERS STARTING AT ENTRY-LEVEL:

We are fortunate in our region that we have several occupations that offer a career pathway for workers that are supported by a strong network of career development and educational institutions. It is our goal to strengthen articulation agreements between regional partners to ensure students seeking to enter or advance in their careers will have access to education and training linked together to scaffold their success. As a regional strategy we are also supporting the development of a strong apprenticeship system to allow workers to advance their careers through paid hands-on work and formal education. Apprenticeships and associated pre-apprentice training has been established in the building trades, manufacturing, commercial drivers, diesel technicians, and pharmacy technicians.

Broad Labor Supply Challenges and Opportunities



THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BROAD LABOR SUPPLY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE REGION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS BASED ON EXISTING REGIONAL WORKFORCE:

The most significant broad labor challenges facing the region over the next five years are:

- Aging workforce
- Lack of employment readiness & social/emotional skills
- Increase in share of workforce needing English skills.
- Affordable childcare
- Limited transportation

Aging workforce

Based on our recent employer survey, the most significant challenge facing our businesses is finding and retaining talent. Employers report the loss of older workers as they retire is creating larger supply gaps within our priority industries and this is bolstered by the data of our region's workforce (25.5%) is aged 55 or older. The added challenge is that these workers are often the most experienced so when they retire, it is difficult to replace them with workers with the same level of knowledge and skill set.

Lack of employment readiness & social/emotional skills

Employers also report that they often see job candidates and new hires that do not have the soft skills needed for performance in the workplace. These skills include time management, communication, social-emotional awareness, and teamwork. Complicating this challenge is the fact that these skills are hard to measure and difficult to teach in a classroom setting.

Increase in share of workforce needing English skills

The regional demographic trends indicate that the region's population growth has been fueled by net inflow of New Americans (immigrants, refugees).

Over the past decade, the share of foreign-born residents has grown by 8%, and the percent of residents in the region of Hispanic ethnicity has grown by 14%.

This inflow of New Americans includes a significant portion that have limited English communication skills. Regionally, it is reported that 8% of residents have limited English proficiency. To overcome their barriers to employment, this population typically requires remedial services in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and/or Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes. Depending upon their past work experience, they may also need occupational training prior to being hired. A small percentage of our immigrant/refugee population may arrive highly skilled but non-credentialed here in the U.S. They may also be faced with a language barrier and/or a need for an additional certification or credential before being hired. Unfortunately, the current wait list for enrollment into ESOL classes is more than 1,000 and funding for additional classes is limited.

Challenges Surrounding Childcare in the Region

Available and affordable childcare continues to be a significant barrier to employment for residents (families?) in the Central region. Following COVID, many childcare facilities closed, the majority in the family childcare sector. This left some families with no choice other than to require a stay-at-home arrangement. For others, the high cost of

childcare meant a reduction in income available to pay for housing, food, and other necessities.

Another issue is the wage paid to childcare workers. This industry does not generally pay a living wage until a childcare worker reaches the higher levels such as lead teacher or Center Director.

Limited Transportation

The Central MA area contains a few cities, numerous towns, and also rural communities. This variety affords residents opportunities to experience the rich diversity of these various communities; however, it makes transportation a challenge for those without a dependable vehicle. Public transportation is available throughout much of the region through fixed bus routes from the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority which serves 21 communities in the northern part of our region and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority which serves 35 communities. Connection to the MBTA commuter rail service is offered in Fitchburg, Leominster, and Worcester, and paratransit service is also available throughout most of the region. Unfortunately, given the limited amount of fixed route service outside of Worcester and Fitchburg, utilizing public transportation for employment outside these cities is often not a viable option for job seekers/employees.

THE TOP 3 BROAD LABOR SUPPLY OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE REGION OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS BASED ON THE EXISTING WORKFORCE IN THE REGION:

The top broad labor supply opportunities facing the region over the next 5 years based on our existing workforce in the region includes integration of

New Americans into the workforce, incumbent staff development, and expanding the labor pool to non-traditional workers.

Integration of New Americans into the workforce

As noted previously, the growth of our region's workforce has been fueled by the influx of people born outside the United States settling in our region. This includes immigrants, refugees, and other foreign-born residents legally able to work in the US.

Incumbent staff development

The second opportunity is increasing the skills of existing staff to meet company demand. This requires employer commitment to employee mentoring, training and development, but may be done more easily than attempting to lure workers from outside the region, especially for entry and middle-level jobs that typically do not pay enough to entice people to uproot their residence and requires additional costs to employers attempting to have a meaningful presence away from the location they're hiring in.

Some of the ways businesses might develop their employees could include:

- Skills training, either in-house or through outside training centers
 - Opportunities for promotion and/or career development
 - Coaching and mentoring
 - Offering tuition reimbursement
 - Encouraging pursuit of continuing education
 - Development of a formal Registered Apprenticeship to promote a set career advancement pathway for staff
- Employees report feeling valued when they see that the company is investing in them. This growth and development help employees expand their knowledge, skills and abilities and apply the competencies they have gained to new situations. This translates into positive gains for the organization by enhancing organizational effectiveness, improving work quality, and helping

business to attract and retain top talent.

Expansion of the traditional labor pool

A third opportunity exists in expanding the existing labor pool through skill preparation, training, and work support for non-traditional workers in various industries. This includes increased hiring of people with a disability in manufacturing, expanded career opportunities for people with criminal backgrounds/ex-prisoners, and older workers seeking a second career.

CHARACTERISTICS OF UNEMPLOYED AND UNDEREMPLOYED WORKERS IN THE REGION:

The four prominent characteristics of the unemployed and underemployed workers in our region that the regional planning team identified are:

- Older workers & long-term unemployed
- Lower formal education level
- Lack of English proficiency
- Geographic location/transportation

Many of our older workers continue to struggle with finding full-time employment and a significant portion of them are long-term unemployed. Their biggest challenge is that they come with years of experience and often at a high salary. They find themselves trapped by employer stereotypes such as not sticking around long (flight risk) and costing too much in terms of salary, health insurance and retirement. Businesses often do not want to take a chance on these older workers. Another issue facing the long-term unemployed workers is discrimination based on the duration of their unemployment. They are often faced with an uphill battle when competing for employment with currently working younger job applicants. We need to work with our business partners to more clearly understand that hiring should be based on one's ability to do the job, not his or her age or current employment status.

Education level is another characteristic of our unemployed and underem-

ployed workers. Some workers only have a high school diploma or high school equivalency credential when employers require a college degree. Many are raising families and do not have the resources and/or time to step away from the work world and return to school. Working with our education partners, we need to continue to find alternative ways to help these workers get the education or training they need. Possibilities include tuition reimbursement from the employer, evening or weekend classes, and online education.

As noted previously, there exists an extremely high need in our region for ESOL classes. One of the biggest barriers to employment right now is the lack of English proficiency in our job seekers combined with the fact that our local, publicly funded ESOL programs have extensive waiting lists. One way for us to address this issue is to educate our business partners and encourage them to apply for a Workforce Training grant to provide ESOL training for their workers.



Existing Pipeline and Education

DESCRIPTION OF THE REGION'S EXISTING PIPELINES OF NEW WORKERS (CREDENTIALS) ACROSS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECONDARY AND POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS:

There are many educational institutions and training entities in Central MA and an extensive amount of career-related education and training that is already taking place or anticipated to begin over the course of the next four years. Educational institutions in the Central MA region include three public universities (the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, Fitchburg State University, and Worcester State University), two community colleges (Quinsigamond Community College and Mount Wachusett Community College), several private four-year colleges (Nichols, Holy Cross, Assumption, Anna Maria, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, Becker, Clark, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute), as well as the Grafton and Shriver Job Corps Centers, and five vocational schools, which offer

both day and evening programs; Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical High School, Worcester Technical High School, Bay Path Regional Vocational High School, Blackstone Valley Vocational High School, and the Leominster High School Center For Technical Education Innovation (additionally, the Assabet Valley Vocational High School is located on the edge of our region, providing programming to day and evening students residing in our region). There are numerous Career Technical Education (CTE) providers including the Worcester Community Action Council, the Fieldstone School, Youth Opportunities Upheld (YOU), Inc., the Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development, Training Resources of America, Peak Medical, the South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Worcester Public Schools Night Life and Adult Basic Education Center. Additionally, Career Technical Initiative providers including, Montachusett Regional High School, Minute-man Vocational Tech, Worcester Public Schools, and Nashoba Valley Technical High School.

These regional education and training partners, and others not mentioned by name above, are doing much to align their efforts with the demands of our region's employers. Some of these efforts include:

■ As the region's largest school district, the **Worcester Public Schools** offers an example of the range of programs available. The WPS 2023-2028 Strategic Plan and newly released Vision of a Learner demonstrate the district's commitment to helping all WPS students to become future-ready to lead meaningful and purposeful lives after high school. WPS scholars will leverage a broad set of multi-literate skills to graduate as problem solvers, curious learners, empowered individuals, effective communicators, and engaged community members.

■ WPS also remains committed to numerous efforts to expand access to high-quality CTE programs including but not limited to:

- Worcester Technical High School (WTHS) continues pushing the enrollment limit of 1,500 students.

WTHS has 23 vocational-technical programs. The building and its 23 programs are the cohesive infrastructure supporting many community programs, Innovation Career Pathways, and Nightlife programs.

- WPS is also expanding program offerings at their academic high schools. North High School is offering Business Technology along with its existing Allied Health program. They also offer a non-Chapter 74 Early Childhood Education program. Doherty is continuing its Engineering program and is adding 3 new Chapter 74 programs in the fall. Those programs are Programming and Web Development, Construction/Craft Laborer and Marketing, Management and Finance. Doherty will also be exploring a Biomedical program at the new High School over the next few years. South High will continue its Diesel Technology, Culinary, and Early Childhood programs. They also offer a non-Chapter 74 Automotive program.

- Innovative Career Pathways (ICP) WPS has the largest ICP program in the state supporting 300 WPS annually to access high-demand industries across seven career pathways: Advance Manufacturing, Allied Health, Biotechnology, Business & Marketing, Computer Science, Construction & Related Engineering, and Information Technology. ICP students learn industry relevant knowledge and skills in two pathway specific technical courses offered as part of an extended day program at WTHS. Students receive extensive career exploration and development support and have opportunities to take dual enrollment courses, earn industry recognized credentials, and participate in multiple paid internships. Industry partnerships and networking opportunities are embedded throughout all ICP pathways.

- WPS, in partnership with QCC, is offering an evening certificate HVAC program for 15 students at WTHS. This program is currently

a certificate program that QCC is looking to move to as an Associate degree program in the near future, with possible Pell eligibility.

- WPS has expanded its Night Life (evening CTE program) to offer area residents access to additional in-demand, affordable, short-term CTE programs such as Clinical Medical Asst Training, Diesel Technician Training, Pharmacy Technician Training, Electrical Code & Theory Classes, Plumbing Code & Theory Classes, and Intro to Welding.

CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

■ **QUINSIGAMOND COMMUNITY COLLEGE** is deeply committed to aligning our programming to effectively meet the evolving needs of local employers and the broader workforce. The key initiatives include:

- **Equipping Non-English Speakers for Employment:** QCC develops and delivers programs tailored to non-English-speaking individuals and those with limited English proficiency. These programs encompass:

- Integrated Basic Education and Training (IBEST) programs in crucial fields such as healthcare, accounting, early education and care, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing.
- Career training programs offered in Spanish within healthcare and business domains.
- Dual-language programs specifically crafted for Early Education and Care.

- **Empowering through Apprenticeships:** QCC boasts a robust apprenticeship program that seamlessly blends classroom instruction

with on-the-job training, priming individuals for successful careers. These apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships span priority sectors including healthcare, hospitality, biotechnology, and IT. We are actively exploring avenues to expand this program to include the awarding of apprenticeship degrees, underscoring our commitment to growth in this area.

- **Fostering Competency-Based Education:** QCC is actively developing competency-based education programs with the aim of streamlining career preparation and facilitating a quicker entry into the workforce.

- **Supporting Adult Learners through Mass Reconnect:** Through the Mass Reconnect program, QCC is dedicated to supporting adults without college credentials to enroll in certificate or degree programs, equipping them with the skills needed to fill regional job vacancies.

- **Industry Partnership Initiatives:** Through the Center for Workforce Development and Continuing Education, QCC collaborates closely with employers to leverage state grants aimed at addressing workforce needs in priority industries. Programs such as the Donnelly Success grants, SCALE grants, and the Returning Citizens grants are specifically tailored to prepare workers

continued on next page



continued from previous page

with the requisite credentials for meaningful employment opportunities.

• **Fast-Track Skill Development:**

Through the Center for Workforce Development and Continuing Education, QCC offers Fast-Track skill development programs designed to expedite the journey from skills training to employment. These programs feature streamlined timelines without compromising on quality, ensuring rapid entry into the workforce. Additionally, we provide a comprehensive suite of programs tailored for career advancement and career transition, allowing individuals to pursue their professional goals and provide employers with the skilled workers needed.

• **Basic Skills for Adult Learners:**

Through QCC's Adult Community Learning Center, QCC delivers programming for English language learners and adults seeking a high school equivalency, such as a GED. These programs prepare adult learners to move directly into the workforce or into additional training and education.

Quinsigamond Community College offers a diverse range of healthcare certificate & degree programs that are designed to meet the evolving needs of the regional workforce in healthcare. Programs in allied health, emergency services and nursing ensure we have a pipeline of health professionals available for local employers.

■ **MOUNT WACHUSETT COMMUNITY COLLEGE** serves the labor demands of the region through diverse programming spanning credit and non-credit course offerings across multiple divisions of the college, maximizing opportunities for youth through Early College partnerships and the United Way Youth Venture Programs as well as Adult Learners through comprehensive education and training programs offered through the Division

of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development. MWCC engages in relentless efforts to align evidence-based practices and an equity-framed organizational mindset with emerging trends in program design, teaching and learning, and workforce development. As such, MWCC develops deep connections with the communities and employers we serve, positioning ourselves as the conduit to social change and the driver of economic stability within North Central Massachusetts. MWCC seeks to increase the educational attainment and earnings power of North Central Massachusetts residents through structured cross-agency partnerships, deep employer engagement, accelerated pathways to learning such as non-credit to credit pathways/apprenticeship programs/on-the-job training programs/etc., while maximizing technology and remote services to mitigate time and space barriers that disproportionately impact adult learners and learners of color across the region.

• **MWCC Early College**

MWCC Early College Programs drive K-12 partnerships and workforce development across the region. Through various initiatives Early College Programs provide opportunities for students across the region to simultaneously earn high school and college credit accelerating learning and creating attainable pathways to post-secondary education for high school students across the region. Many Early College partnerships embed workforce preparation activities preparing the regions' youth for the modern work environment while also embedding industry training programs offered through the MWCC Division of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development providing pathways to industry recognized credentials within priority industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology for Early College Students.

• **MWCC Division of Lifelong Learn-**

ing and Workforce Development

The MWCC Division of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development offers low-cost or cost-free programming for individuals seeking any number of education and training opportunities. The Division operates five distinct departments serving the region's students and employers: (1) The MassLINKS Adult Education Online Academy at Mount Wachusett Community College (2) The Department of Adult Education (3) The Department of Workforce Access and Education (4) The Department of Correctional Education, and (5) The Department of Corporate Training and Community Education. All of these Departments work in collaboration to move the division and college mission of access and equity forward across the region.

• **MassLINKS Adult Education Online Academy at MWCC**

The MassLINKS Adult Education Online Academy at MWCC is the only statewide fully remote program operating out of the Public Adult Education Systems of the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit of DESE. MassLINKS serves roughly 700 students per year seeking either their High School Equivalency (HSE) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. All courses are cost free for students and the program provides technology for students without technology sufficient for academic success and in its first full-year of operation produced Measurable Skill Gain Outcomes above the 6-year statewide average for all Adult Education Programs. In FY24 MassLINKS partnered with the MassHire North Central Career Center to pilot ESOL courses specifically designed for Migrant Populations within North Central Massachusetts geared to workplace language development and enrollment in training programs aligned to priority industries within the region creating pathways to increased earnings for individuals newly arrived to the country and region.

• **The Department of Adult Education**

The Department of Adult Education offers cost-free, site-based courses out of the MWCC Leominster Campus for individuals seeking their High School Equivalency or English for Speakers of Other Languages courses. Courses are offered during the day or evening and provide high quality, face-to-face options for eligible individuals within the region.

• **The Department of Workforce Access and Education**

The Department of Workforce Access and Education provides cost free, short-term, occupational training programs aligned to priority industries across the region. Eligibility for these programs is generally dictated by funding sources. However, programs are designed to serve un or unemployed individuals within the region. Currently, the Department of WAE at MWCC offers site-based and online short-term training programs in Healthcare, Early Childhood Education, Advanced Manufacturing, and Information Technology. Healthcare programs include CNA and Certified Medical Administrative Assistant while Manufacturing programs focus on robotics and production technician training programs. Information Technology courses include IT Support Specialist and Cybersecurity. All programs lead to industry recognized credentials, included non-credit to credit pathways to accelerate credit attainment, and incorporate work-based learning opportunities where appropriate.

• **The Department of Correctional Education**

The MWCC Department of Correctional Education operates the MWCC Prison Education Programs at both NCCI-Gardner and MCI-Shirley. These programs are credit-based certificate and Associate's Degree programs in Business Administration and Accounting. Programs offer academic courses, support services, academic advising and financial assistance, as well as

post-release transitional support for individuals within the incarcerated environment at North Central Massachusetts DOC facilities.

• **The Department of Corporate Training and Community Education**

The MWCC Department of Corporate Training and Community Education leads employer relations at MWCC which includes partnering with regional employers to identify organizational needs, customize training options to meet those needs, and identifying funding available to support talent development and incumbent worker training programs. Corporate Training programs are unique to each organization and project and vary greatly in scope. Trainings can encompass everything from one-time workshops to multi-cohort, multi-year projects tailored to employer size, need, and incumbent worker population. Community Education programming offers lifelong learning and personal enrichment and youth programming to the community.

In addition to these departments specifically focused on workforce development initiatives within the region, MWCC partners with the MassHire Department of Career Services and the MassHire North Central Workforce Board to Operate the MassHire North Central Career Center. Co-located at Erdman Way, this collaboration ensures the effectiveness and efficiency of the vast network of regional providers and state agencies committed to regional service and growth.

Fitchburg State University and Mount Wachusett Community College are collaborating with Leominster High School, Fitchburg High School, Gardner High School, and Sizer Charter School to expand on existing Early College pathways for students who are interested in health care, pre-engineering, information technology and other STEM careers. The initiative provides deep career exploration beginning in 9th grade, and students can gain 12

or more college credits, and even a credential, prior to high school graduation.

FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES/ UNIVERSITIES

■ **FITCHBURG STATE UNIVERSITY** offers several degree options at both the graduate and undergraduate level geared towards individuals who work full or part-time and need greater flexibility in their schedules. These programs are in areas such as business, nursing, and education, which align with regional workforce needs to prepare or advance students in their careers. Additionally, Fitchburg State offers several on-line undergraduate degree completion options including programs in business administration, RN-BS, Early Education and Care, and Interdisciplinary Studies to provide access to working adults who would like to finish their bachelor's degree and apply their real-world experience to their education.

• **Non-Credit Professional Development**

The University also offers several other programs that align with the regional blueprint:

– Fitchburg State University's Center for Professional Studies and the School of Education have continued to cultivate training for regional Para educators via DESE-funded grant programs and other school/workforce partnerships.

– Online and face-to-face Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure preparation workshops to aspiring teachers in our region and has hosted a series of Cultural Competency courses for local educators and school administrators that helped them to improve their understanding of the depth and scope of various issues around race and culture, and how they impact public schools in

continued on next page

continued from previous page

the United States.

- Online course for regional educators on how best to support LGBTQIA+ students in an educational setting.
- o Artificial Intelligence/Chat GPT training for educators.
- Wilson Language Training Certification.
- An online undergraduate Production Technology Certificate program for entry-level manufacturing employees (currently under development).
- Non-credit online self-paced professional development certification courses in the areas of business, IT, cybersecurity, human resources, and sustainable management via a collaboration with MindEdge.

• Education Career Pathways

An occupational/vocational education Bachelor of Science degree is available online to vocational technical teachers located across Massachusetts. The program offers up to 12 credits in recognition of the work experiences of the participating students through the University. Candidates may apply for the trade experience through the Prior Learning Assistance Program after completing 80 credits in the program.

The School of Education also offers several programs to engage diverse middle/high school student populations.

- Future Falcon Academy provides middle school English Language Learners with an enriching on-campus university experience. The focus is for local middle school students to experience Fitchburg State’s culture and environment and see themselves as future students and potentially future educators.
- Tomorrow’s Educator Pathway provides an option for high school students to earn badges through an affiliated program called the Future Educator Academy at Fitchburg State University. The Academy enables high school students to take col-

lege-level education courses prior to graduating, exploring education as a career, and eventually a pathway to a bachelor’s degree.

• Science and Technology

In support of the North Central MA Regional Blueprint, the university has launched a new fully online Master of Science in Construction Management program. The online program will prepare students to manage complex construction projects and enhance their decision-making processes; provide pathways to students to advance into the field of construction management from related disciplines and/or prior construction experience; provide employers with a well-educated and skilled workforce, capable of performing valuable construction management services and ready to serve in managerial and leadership positions. This program supports the Healey/Driscoll Administrations new Affordable Homes Act by providing highly qualified construction management professionals.

■ **WORCESTER STATE UNIVERSITY (WSU)** is leading a multi-year effort to encourage interest among high school students in careers in K-12 education, with a particular focus on encouraging students of color to consider this career path. It is grounded in their Education Department and led by WSU’s Associate Dean of Education, Dr. Raynold Lewis, with special emphasis on identifying potential students from the Worcester Public Schools.

WSU also has a long history in the area of teaching English to non-native speakers, and currently boast of three outlets in that regard: through the Latino Education Institute, WSU offers English language training and assistance to both students in the local school system and their parents; through their Intensive English Language Institute (and the WSU Graduate & Continuing Education division) that offers a collegiate-focused preparation program suitable for students

and professionals; and a graduate level program for teachers of ESL.

■ **CLARK UNIVERSITY** is privately funded, coeducational, and nonsectarian, and offers bachelors, masters, certificate, and doctoral degree programs in a wide range of disciplines. Many of these disciplines apply directly to the needs of priority industries and occupations in Central Massachusetts. Responding to these needs, Clark’s Corporate Outreach Programs provide flexible offerings focused on in demand skills development. We understand that one size does not fit all and offer delivery, financial and operational models that fit the unique needs of businesses and their employees.

Clark’s Micro credential Program delivers rapid cycle training that is online, skills driven and extremely cost effective. Upon completion, students earn digital badges and certificates for in-demand skills like data management and cyber security. Additionally, Clark can offer employers customized credentials based on graduate courses based on an employer’s unique needs. Finally, Clarks Graduate Programs offer advanced degrees and certificates in



Business disciplines like Management, Accounting, Finance, Business Analytics and Marketing. Technology degree programs include Computer Science, Information Technology and Cyber Security, Data Analytics and Project Management.

- Rapid Cycle Training
- Clark Curated Micro credentials
- Online, cost effective and skills driven
- Digital badges and certificates
- Customized Credentials
- Graduate level courses packaged for your unique needs
- Customization and new course development as needed
- Graduate Certificates
- Business Analytics, Post MBA, Management Fellows, Non Profit Leadership
- Advanced Degree Programs
- Business
- Marketing, Finance, Accounting, Business Analytics, Management
- Technology
- Data Analytics, Information Technology, Computer Science, Project Mgt

■ The **UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS CHAN MEDICAL SCHOOL**, the state’s first and only public medical school, is a world-class health sciences campus located in Worcester that is renowned for the quality and scope of its medical research and education. Perennially ranked in the top 10 percent for primary care education by U.S. News & World Report, UMass Chan Medical School advances the health and

well-being of the people of the Commonwealth and the world through pioneering education, research, and health care delivery. The three UMass Chan graduate schools are the T.H. Chan School of Medicine, the Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, and the Tan Chingfen Graduate School of Nursing. The T.H. Chan School of Medicine is committed to training in the full range of medical disciplines, with an emphasis on practice in the primary care specialties, in the public sector and in underserved areas of Massachusetts. The Morningside Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences students receive a broad background in the basic medical sciences and are trained in their selected specialty area in preparation for research with direct relevance to human disease. The Tan Chingfen Graduate School of Nursing offers master’s, post-master’s and doctoral degrees, providing high quality education to prepare registered professional and advanced practice nurses in nurse practitioner and nurse educator specialties and for faculty, research and other nursing leadership positions.

REGIONAL VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS

■ **MONTACHUSETT REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SCHOOL** “Monty Tech” has been providing students across North Central Massachusetts with high-quality

vocational-technical training for more than 50 years. With twenty-one different vocational training programs and a commitment to maintain currency and alignment with regional workforce needs, program instructors work closely with Advisory Committee members who offer guidance regarding curriculum, training equipment and emerging technologies in their respective industries. For example, based on the input of those advisory committee members, the district capitalized on grant funds to fully renovate its Dental Assisting program (\$150,000) as well as to purchase multiple training simulators in our HVAC & Property maintenance program (\$399,546). These critical relationships not only enhance the training program, but also improve student outcomes, with committee members often hiring current students through the school’s popular co-operative education program, or recent graduates for entry level careers.

In terms of recent workforce training innovations, Monty Tech proudly entered into a partnership with Fitchburg Public Schools, Gardner Public Schools, and Narragansett Regional School District, in an effort to provide students in those districts with meaningful vocational training opportunities. Monty Tech found and secured a vacant property close to campus and was awarded a record-setting \$1.88M grant to renovate and equip the facility, turning it into a state-of-the-art training facility for carpentry, electrical and plumbing occupations. Monty Tech’s own students and instructors will completely renovate the space resulting in three new training spaces that will be the new home to the Montachusett Vocational Partnership (MVP) Academy in September 2024. School leaders will continue to promote the innovative partnership and modified “After Dark” schedule, as a model program that, if funded properly, could satisfy concerns for lack of access to vocational programming across the Commonwealth.

continued on next page

continued from previous page

Monty Tech officials look forward to building upon this exceptional partnership that is expected to serve as many as 125 students when all programs are in operation.

The Adult Continuing Education program has grown to include several more workforce readiness programs to ensure the school meets the needs of our local workforce. An emphasis has been placed on the expansion of health-care, manufacturing, transportation, and hospitality training. Unemployed and under-employed adults, adults continuing their education, or those seeking new career pathways may enroll in any of the programs offered during the evening at Monty Tech to gain the skills and credentials necessary to meet the demand in the local workforce.

Worcester Technical High School (WTHS) is a vocational-technical high school, part of Worcester Public Schools district. The current facility opened on August 28, 2006, replacing the old Worcester Vocational High School (formerly known as Worcester Boys' Trade High School from 1909 to about 1975) at 2 Grove Street.

■ **WORCESTER TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL** has 22 different trades from which students can choose, from the 4 different Academies – Alden Design and Engineering (Alden), Allied Health and Human Services (A.H./service), Coghlin Construction Academy (construction), Information Technology and Business Service (I.T.). WTHS is also home to most of the Worcester Public Schools evening career technical training programs offered by the Nightlife adult education and training program.

■ **BAY PATH REGIONAL VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL** serves students from its member Worcester County communities of Auburn, Charlton, Dudley, N. Brookfield, Oxford, Paxton, Rutland, Spencer, Southbridge, and Webster. The

school's programs are also available to pupils outside these areas on a tuition basis. Bay Path is located 60 miles southwest of Boston, 10 miles south of Worcester, and 40 miles east of Springfield. Bay Path has been a visible part of our community by providing services to nonprofit organizations and municipalities. We offer a diverse course selection that addresses both your academic and career goals. Explore our 22 career areas at Bay Path. Evening programs at Bay Path include Advanced Manufacturing, Culinary Arts, or Heating Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), and Practical Nursing.

■ The **BLACKSTONE VALLEY VOCATIONAL** Regional School District was formed in 1964 to provide an exciting and rewarding career education option for students in the towns of Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge, Massachusetts. The school offers 18 vocational-technical programs and a challenging academic curriculum, as well as post-secondary programs. BVT also offers evening career technical training in Advanced Manufacturing Foundational Skills, Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning & Refrigeration, and Practical Nursing.

In addition to the schools listed above, the region also contains several comprehensive high schools that include Chapter 74 vocational programs and/or innovation pathways designated career educational programs including: Leominster, Worcester, Leicester, Webster and others.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS SUPPORTING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WORKFORCE

■ **Youth Works** – The Region's Workforce Boards provide funds, made available by the State through the Commonwealth Corporation, to

support subsidized work experience for income-eligible youth ages 14-25. Work placement sites include for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, and municipalities/public agencies, allowing the program to leverage support from host site staff for supervision and mentorship. In North Central, the program is managed directly through the Workforce Board and in the Central region, the Workforce Board contracts with partner organizations to manage the program day to day.

■ **WIOA Youth** includes a comprehensive program for young people ages 14-24 who face barriers to education, training and employment. The program has 14 required elements — such as tutoring, paid and unpaid work experiences and leadership-development opportunities — and gives preference to supporting out-of-school youth. The 14 elements of WIOA produce a promising workforce of young adults for the future.

■ **MY TURN, Inc.** is a top provider of youth services in North Central MA. With locations in both Leominster and Gardner, two of the area's larger cities, MY TURN provides robust and diverse services to youth across the 27 communities that make up North Central Massachusetts. Addressing the labor force needs of North Central's communities, MY TURN's goal is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing members of the leading industries within the region.

MY TURN delivers academic & tutoring services, job readiness workshops, career pathway exploration, post-secondary education support, paid internships, occupational skills training, leadership development, entrepreneurship skills, financial literacy and much more, all with a dedicated staff offering continuous support, guidance, and counseling along the way.

Upon program completion, all participants receive twelve months of follow up support and case management

to maintain their accomplishments.

In addition to MY TURN, the Central region, also contracts with three organizations to provide WIOA Youth services:

• **Youth Opportunities Upheld, Inc.** provides occupational skill training in IT, CNA, Phlebotomy Tech, EKG training, and high school equivalency preparation, pre-employment/world of work services, enrichment workshops, and follow-up to clients in Worcester, Milford, Whitinsville, and Webster areas.

• **Worcester Community Action Council, Inc.** provides high school equivalency preparation with a concentration on career exploration and post-secondary education enrollment, pre-employment/life skills training, computer skills training, and follow-up to participants who reside in Worcester area and surrounding towns.

• **Fieldstone School** provides Nurse Aide/Home Health Aide, Phlebotomy Tech, EKG training, pre-employment skills and enrichment workshops, and follow up in the Worcester area.

■ **Connecting Activities** - In Central Massachusetts, students are presented with numerous opportunities to engage in meaningful work experiences and internships that align with the region's workforce development blueprint through the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) funded School to Career Connecting Activities program. The Workforce Boards play a crucial role in encouraging, promoting, and coordinating these efforts, particularly by collaborating closely with the region's high schools. The Workforce boards and Connecting Activities partnered schools and intermediaries prepare students to enter the workforce with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for success in the modern job market specifically aligned with the region's workforce development blueprint.

Every fall, partner schools are offered a menu of career readiness activities & services provided by the Workforce Boards and our partners. Depending on the school's specific needs and goals, they can choose from a variety of options, including assistance with organizing and recruiting for job fairs, coordinating field trips, inviting guest speakers, hosting career readiness workshops, and facilitating professional development for school administration and staff. These resources and supports are designed to complement each school specific needs, acknowledging the difference in industries and school districts across the region.

In the Central Region, the Workforce Board partners with the Worcester Public Schools and the Blackstone Valley Hub for Workforce Development to coordinate the various events, programs, and activities offered in partnership with more than twenty school districts in the Central Region.

A major focus of the region's workforce development blueprint is the manufacturing industry. There are six Innovation Pathway manufacturing designated schools in Central Massachusetts. Students enrolled in these programs benefit from specialized teaching, hands-on classroom experiences, and exposure to a wide array of manufacturing-specific opportunities. These include internships, job fairs, and mentorship programs, all geared towards providing students with practical skills and exposure to the manufacturing sector. Manufacturing IP students are expected to complete a 100-hour internship or capstone project prior to graduating.

In the education sector, for select students interested in pursuing careers in education, the region offers the High School Senior Education Internship Program (HSSEIP). This program allows students to participate in a 100-hour internship within their district's K-8 schools, providing valuable experience and insight into the field of education. Additionally, several districts collaborate with Fitchburg State Uni-

versity and Mount Wachusett Community College to offer educational tract training programs, further preparing students for careers in education.

In healthcare, Worcester North High School, Fitchburg High School, and our region's four vocational high schools offer dedicated Healthcare pathways to students interested in this field. Through specialized coursework and practical experiences, students gain a comprehensive understanding of the healthcare sector and are equipped with the skills needed to pursue careers in various healthcare professions.

Partner schools use Connecting Activities and the database at various levels of intensity. Connecting Activities monitor and guide youth with structured, paid & unpaid internships, and employment opportunities. Connecting Activities is designed to transform every youth employment and exposure into a work-based learning experience, with the goal of enhancing the student's job performance and future employability. Work-based learning can be credit or non-credit bearing and used for credit recovery or to meet graduation requirements.

■ **Other Youth Workforce Development Initiatives** – beyond the initiatives highlighted above there are other efforts happening and available in the central MA area that affords young people the opportunity to explore careers and increase work-readiness. These include several career technical programs happening through the DESE-funded Innovation Pathways initiative, federally-funded training through YouthBuild and Job Corps (with Centers throughout the Northeast, including two in our central area – the Grafton and Shriver Job Corps Centers), as well as a myriad of programs happening in non-school hours offered through community-based organizations, including programming aligned with the region's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) network.

Vision, Mission, Goals



The regional planning team has established the following **vision statement** for the region's efforts:

The residents of Central MA have the skills needed to live prosperous, productive lives which support a strong regional economy.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Our mission as a collaboration of Central MA workforce stakeholders is to create a responsive and connected workforce system that prepares residents throughout their lives for living wage career opportunities by meeting the labor demand needs of our local businesses.

To support this mission, we as partners collectively agree to take ownership for actively engaging with our partners to integrate our services and develop programming that aligns with our region's workforce needs.

The regional goals that the planning team has established are:

GOAL 1: Align and coordinate regional Education, Workforce Development, and Economic Development systems.

- Convene Partnership leaders twice annually to review progress and regional labor market information, and to adjust programming and planning, as necessary.
- Interconnect existing workforce structures and membership between the partner systems to ensure real-time communication and programmatic alignment.
 - Workforce Development Boards, Youth Councils, and Adult/Career Center subcommittees
 - MassHire BizWorks regional team
 - Central and North Central WIOA Partner oversight groups
 - School industry advisory committees (including Chapter 74 career technical training program and Innovation Pathway program industry advisory committees)
- Collect business service performance and outcome data from all stakeholders to create a comprehensive regional “dashboard” report for public audience to highlight the value we collectively bring to businesses, including the development of qualified labor for the region's employers.

GOAL 2: Provide industry with a training system responsive to workforce needs.

- Ongoing coordination with the regional Mass BizWorks “response-team” to serve as the connection between businesses in need and system partners (see attachment 5 – Regional Demand-Driven Programming Development).
- Continuously Integrate business need feedback into regional Youth Council, Career Center, and partner program development processes – including Chapter 74 career technical education and Innovation pathways, Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, and the Career Technical Training Initiative programming.
- Support the MA EOLWD Recruitment Solutions Initiative (RSI) referral process at all of the region's MassHire Career Centers

GOAL 3: Improve the foundational and work readiness/soft skills of our region's labor force.

- Increase exposure to soft skills in high schools, colleges, training programs and career centers through the creation and expanded access to career readiness training materials.
- Increase career awareness activities in the region's high schools – and better align them with employers and labor market information.
- Build stronger foundational computer skills for residents (both youth and adults).

GOAL 4: Close the skills gap for priority industries and occupations.

- Regularly review regional baseline measures for priority industries/ occupation goals and set target goals, including:
 - Decrease vacancy rate.
 - Increase the number of CTE program placements.
 - Improve the supply/demand ratio.
 - Increase the business utilization percentage rate for Mass BizWorks-affiliated partner services.
 - Improve career center/WIOA Partner performance (number of businesses served, job orders, job referrals, and hiring).
- Expand Career Technical Education (CTE and CTI), both day and evening, for priority industries and occupations.
- Increase exposure in secondary education to high priority industries.
- Expand incumbent worker career advancement and Registered Apprenticeships for priority industries.
- Increase contextualized ABE and ESOL programming that trains for high priority industries.
- Expand articulation agreements between education and training institutions for priority industries and occupations.

How Do We Get There?

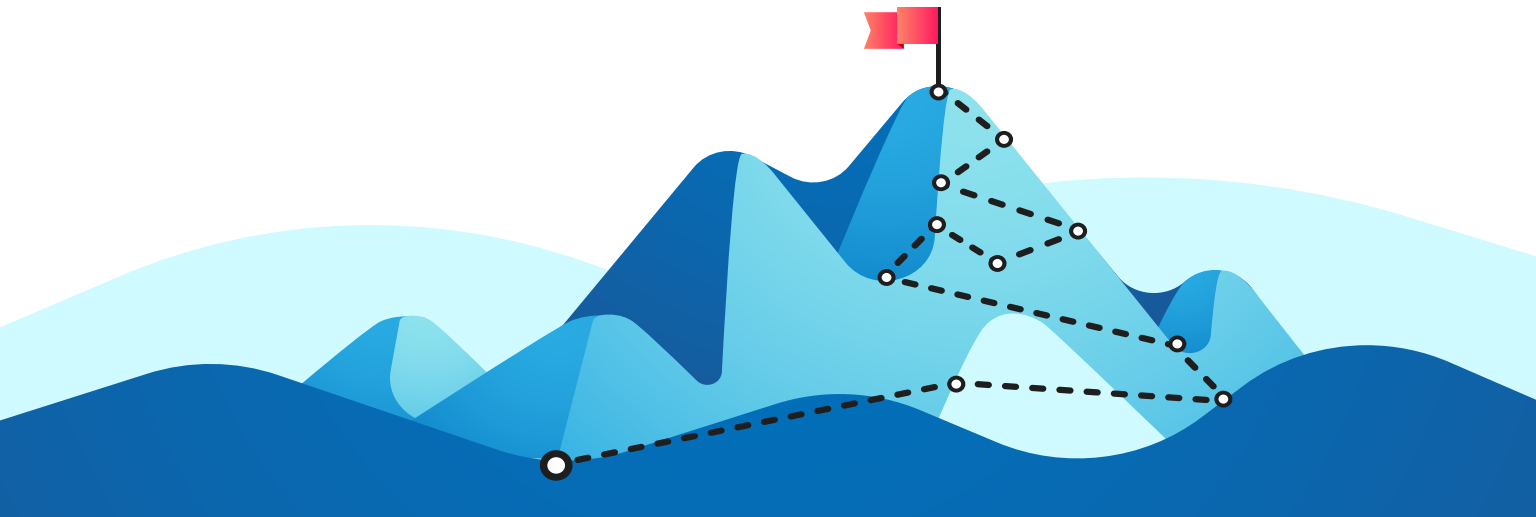


The regional planning team has identified several strategies to achieve our goals. These include:

Strategy	Responsible entity
Sharing accountability through a Regional Partner Leadership Team (RPLT)	All (MassHire Boards to serve as convener)
Development of baseline measures and key metrics and a public outcomes dashboard report to measure our progress	RPLT
Creation of articulation agreements between educational and training institutions	K-12, higher-ed, other training partners
Expanding contextualized ABE and ESOL programming for priority industries/occupations	ABE and ESOL provider partners
Alignment of CTE programs with industry needs and expansion of off-hours programming at our Vocational Technical high schools and other training facilities	MassHire, K-12, higher-ed, other training partners
Creation of apprenticeships across priority industries	MassHire
Expansion of a regional MassHire BizWorks peer-to-peer team and real-time online platform to support their work	MassHire BizWorks

Utilizing and inter-weaving existing structures and frameworks to support our work

RPLT



CONTINUOUS COMMUNICATION

The regional planning group will continue to meet a minimum of twice per year. This will help the blueprint team to identify changes in industry trends and be able to make changes in the region's course direction, if needed. There will be regular communication with our core team through quarterly meetings to assess progress and needs. The region will also use the regional workforce development board meetings and the previously noted existing regional committees and workgroups (including WIOA partner groups, the Mass BizWorks regional team, and school industry advisory committees) to actively engage employers, share relevant information, and drive new programming.

MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTIVITIES

Education

- Create/expand CTE and CTI programs for priority industries/occupations (high school, afterschool & evening, college) including Pell-eligible programs.
- Create new training programs in the priority industries/occupations between now and 2027, including fast-track (boot camp) style programs and competency-based programs.
- Maintain bridge programs designed as a pathway from ESL to a career technical certificate and/or associate degree.

Workforce Development

- Utilize demand-driven approach at region's MassHire Career Centers – increase referrals to job openings and training in priority industries and occupations
- Increase soft-skills training for career center customers
- Prioritize the priority industries/occupation for WIOA Youth, YouthWorks subsidized youth employment placements, and other youth career development programs
- Increase services to businesses in priority industries/occupations, including referrals to Workforce Training Fund and other resources

Economic Development

- Increase the number of business referrals from ED to workforce in priority industries and occupations
- Align business services/support data between ED and workforce systems – establish data sharing platform





Worcester County, MA

Contents

Report Parameters	1
Economy Overview	2
Unemployment by Demographics	5
Historic & Projected Trends	10
Population Characteristics	15
Inbound and Outbound Migration	17
Industry Characteristics	21
Business Characteristics	26
Workforce Characteristics	28
Educational Pipeline	34
In-Demand Skills	35

Report Parameters

1 County

25027 Worcester County, MA

Class of Worker

QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

The information in this report pertains to the chosen geographical area.

Economy Overview

873,651

Population (2024)

Population grew by 44,324 over the last 5 years and is projected to grow by 32,396 over the next 5 years.

398,027

Total Regional Employment

Jobs grew by 244 over the last 5 years and are projected to grow by 11,468 over the next 5 years.

\$93.6K

Median Household Income (2023)

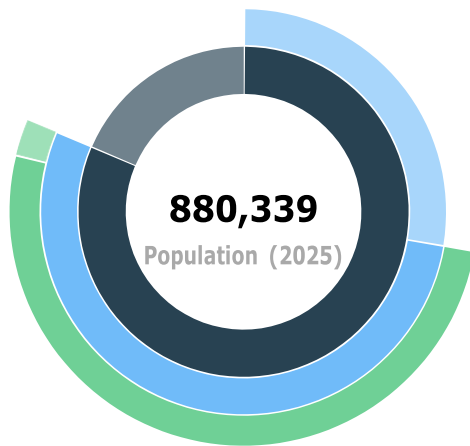
Median household income is \$15.0K above the national median household income of \$78.5K.

Takeaways

- As of 2024 the region's population increased by 5.3% since 2019, growing by 44,324. Population is expected to increase by 3.7% between 2024 and 2029, adding 32,396.
- From 2019 to 2024, jobs increased by 0.1% in Worcester County, MA from 397,783 to 398,027. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 4.1% by 4.0%. As the number of jobs increased, the labor force participation rate decreased from 69.2% to 66.4% between 2019 and 2024.
- Concerning educational attainment, 22.6% of Worcester County, MA residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (1.1% above the national average), and 8.9% hold an Associate's Degree (0.0% above the national average).
- The top three industries in 2024 are Education and Hospitals (Local Government), Restaurants and Other Eating Places, and General Medical and Surgical Hospitals.

	Population (2025)	Labor Force (Apr 2025)	Jobs (2024)	Cost of Living	GRP	Imports	Exports
Region	880,339	472,762	398,027	123.6	\$64.49B	\$63.14B	\$56.60B
State	7,037,782	3,941,251	4,068,167	132.3	\$768.76B	\$499.01B	\$627.69B

Apr 2025 Labor Force Breakdown



	Population
● 16+ Civilian Non-Institutionalized Population	716,032
● Not in Labor Force (16+)	243,270
● Labor Force	472,762
● Employed	450,302
● Unemployed	22,460
● Under 16, Military, and institutionalized Population	164,307

Educational Attainment

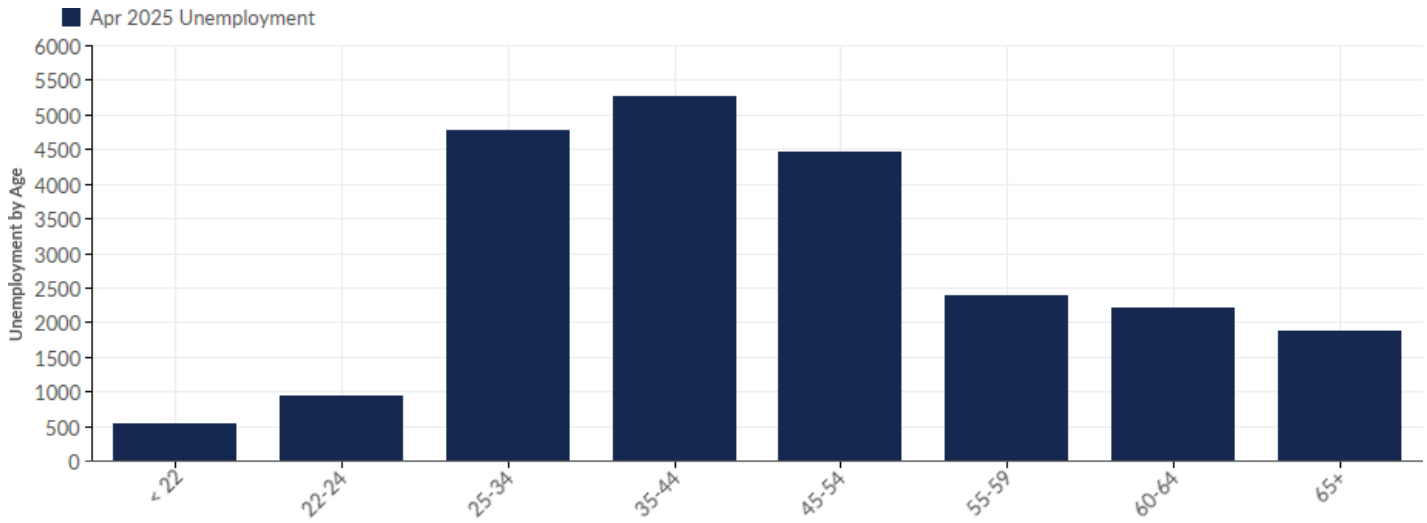
Concerning educational attainment, 22.6% of Worcester County, MA residents possess a Bachelor's Degree (1.1% above the national average), and 8.9% hold an Associate's Degree (0.0% above the national average).



	% of Population	Population
● Less Than 9th Grade	3.6%	22,068
● 9th Grade to 12th Grade	5.1%	31,482
● High School Diploma	26.1%	161,224
● Some College	16.9%	104,290
● Associate's Degree	8.9%	55,023
● Bachelor's Degree	22.6%	139,711
● Graduate Degree and Higher	16.9%	104,785

Unemployment by Demographics

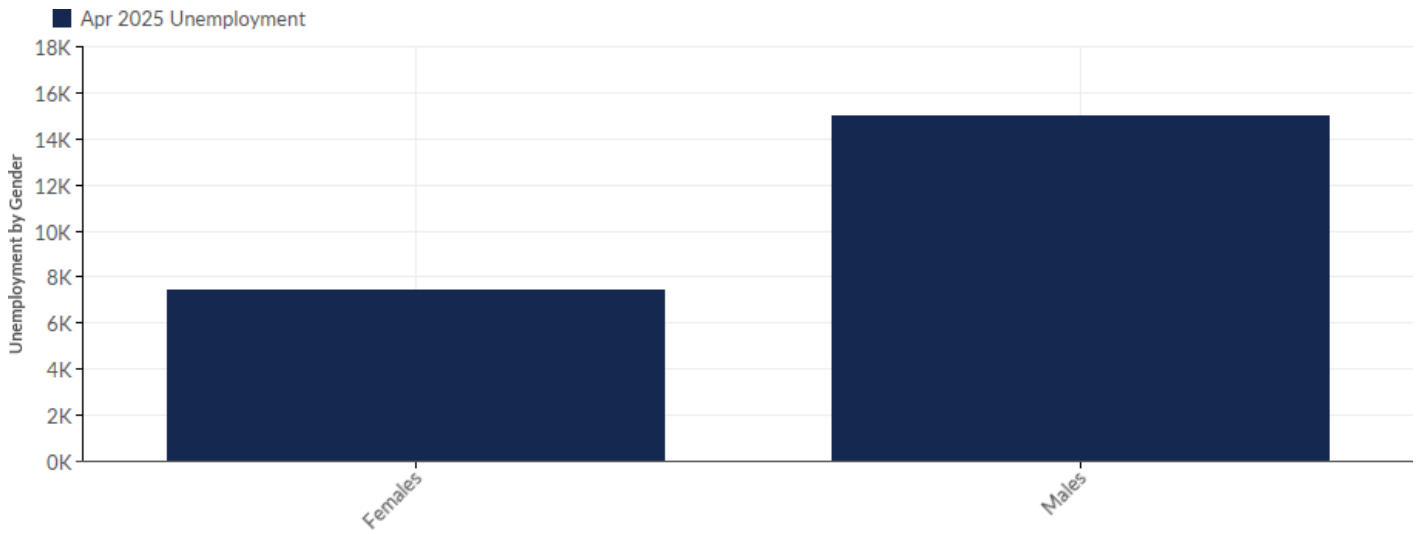
Unemployment by Age



Age	Unemployment (Apr 2025)	% of Unemployed
< 22	542	2.41%
22-24	946	4.21%
25-34	4,764	21.21%
35-44	5,267	23.45%
Total	22,460	100.00%

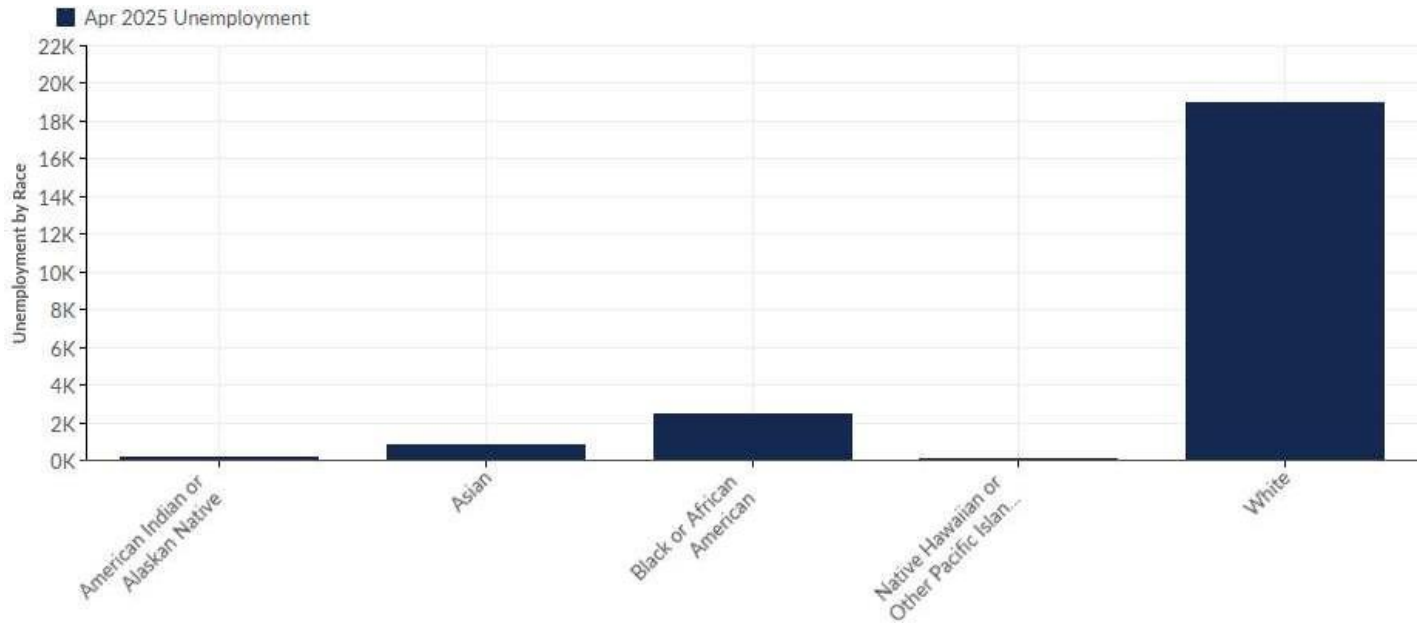
Age	Unemployment (Apr 2025)	% of Unemployed	
45-54	4,465	19.88%	
55-59	2,389	10.64%	
60-64	2,209	9.84%	
65+	1,877	8.36%	
	Total	22,460	100.00%

Unemployment by Gender



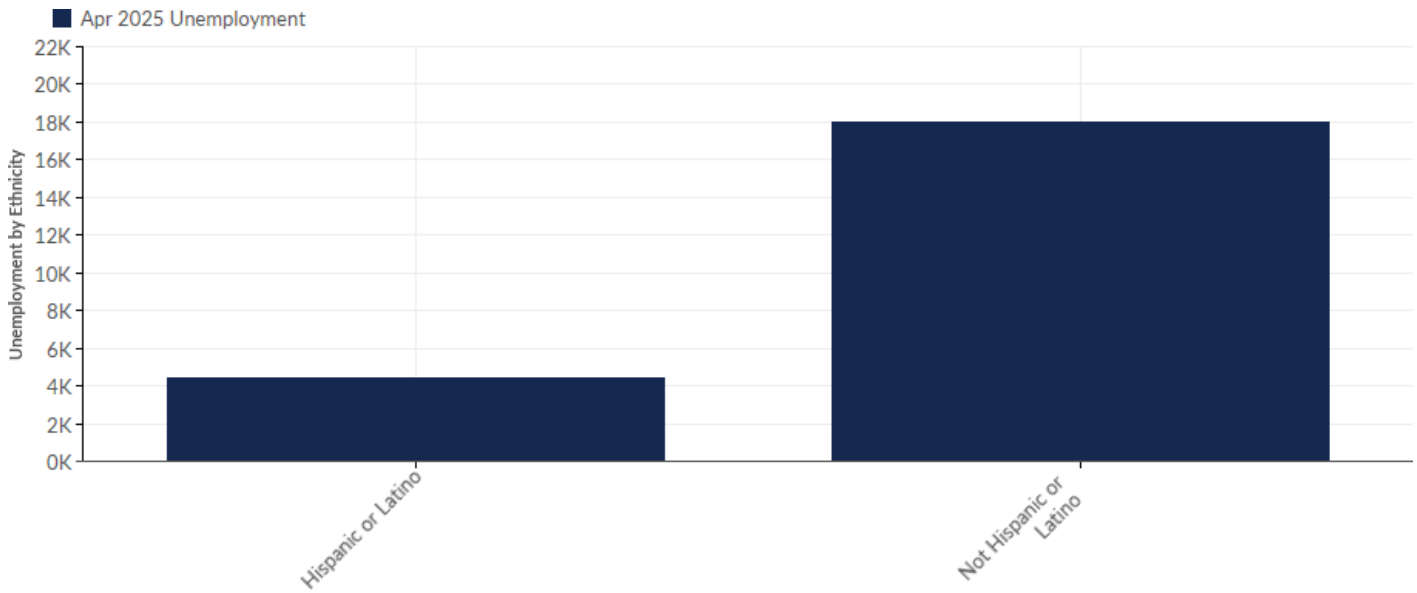
Gender	Unemployment (Apr 2025)	% of Unemployed
Females	7,449	33.17%
Males	15,011	66.83%
Total	22,460	100.00%

Unemployment by Race



Race	Unemployment (Apr 2025)	% of Unemployed
American Indian or Alaskan Native	161	0.72%
Asian	828	3.69%
Black or African American	2,464	10.97%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	62	0.28%
White	18,945	84.35%
Total	22,460	100.00%

Unemployment by Ethnicity

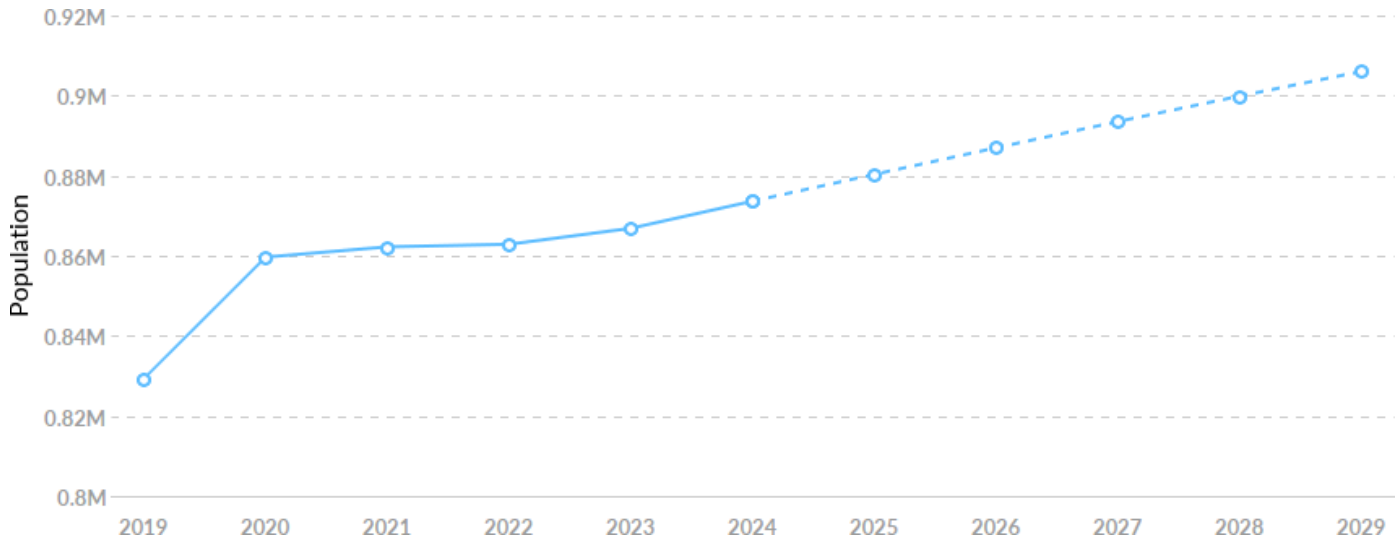


Ethnicity	Unemployment (Apr 2025)	% of Unemployed
Hispanic or Latino	4,432	19.73%
Not Hispanic or Latino	18,028	80.27%
Total	22,460	100.00%

Historic & Projected Trends

Population Trends

As of 2024 the region's population increased by 5.3% since 2019, growing by 44,324. Population is expected to increase by 3.7% between 2024 and 2029, adding 32,396.

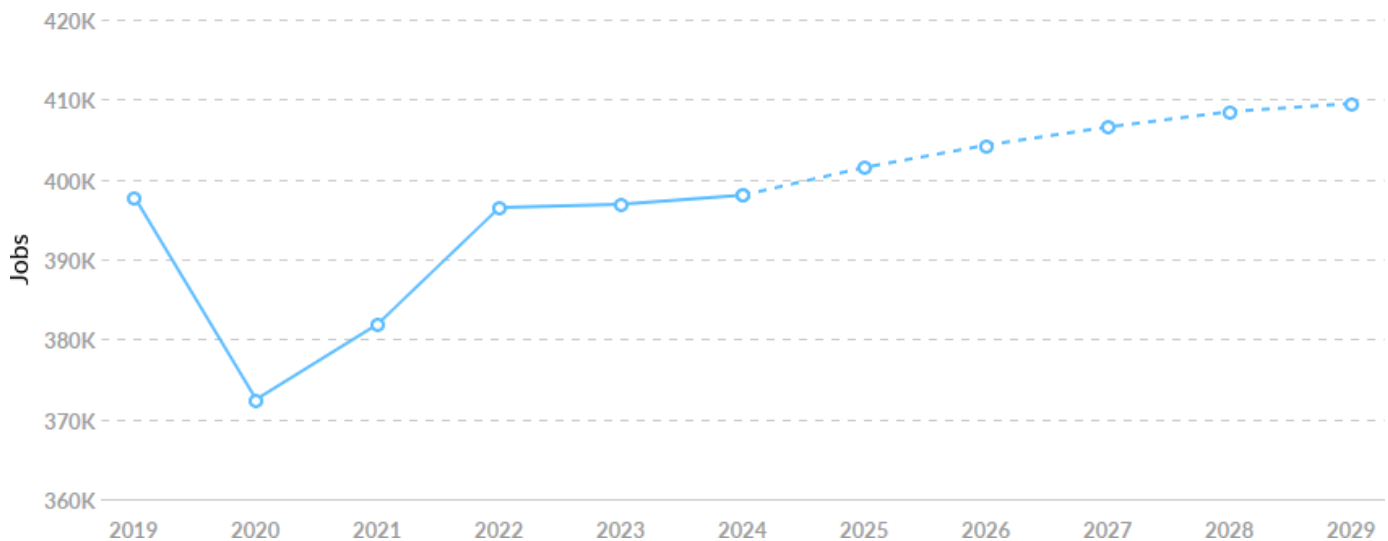


Timeframe	Population
2019	829,327
2020	859,669
2021	862,224
2022	862,873
2023	866,866

Timeframe	Population
2024	873,651
2025	880,339
2026	886,977
2027	893,529
2028	899,892
2029	906,047

Job Trends

From 2019 to 2024, jobs increased by 0.1% in Worcester County, MA from 397,783 to 398,027. This change fell short of the national growth rate of 4.1% by 4.0%.



Timeframe	Jobs
2019	397,783
2020	372,458
2021	381,893
2022	396,473
2023	396,883
2024	398,027
2025	401,500
2026	404,286
2027	406,554
2028	408,478
2029	409,495

Labor Force Participation Rate Trends

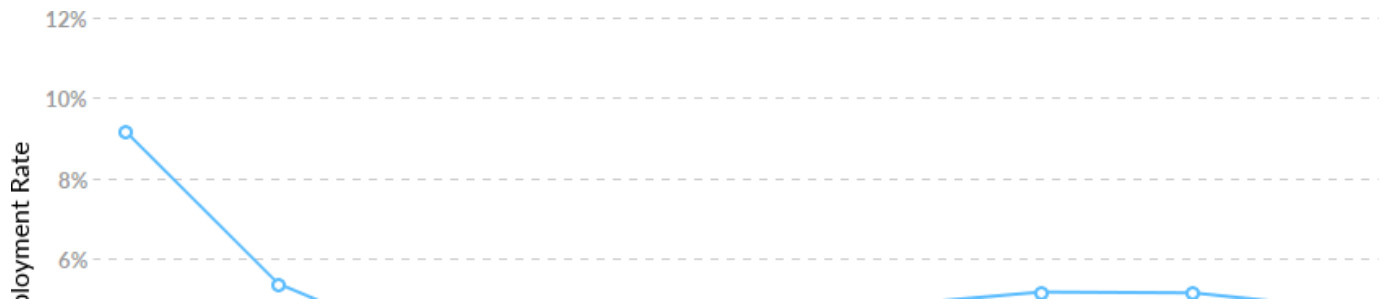


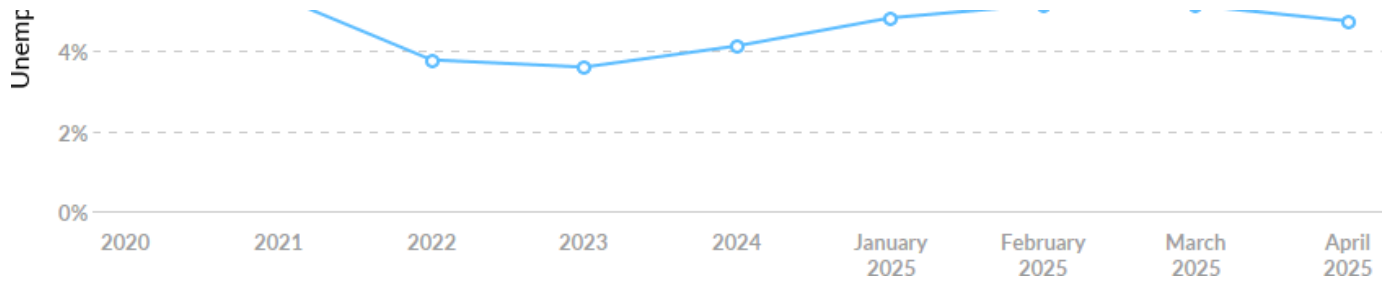


Timeframe	Labor Force Participation Rate
2020	64.99%
2021	64.52%
2022	64.80%
2023	64.93%
2024	65.86%
January 2025	66.16%
February 2025	66.22%
March 2025	66.06%
April 2025	66.03%

Unemployment Rate Trends

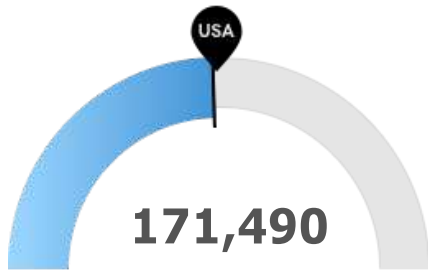
Worcester County, MA had an April 2025 unemployment rate of 4.75%, decreasing from 9.16% 5 years before.





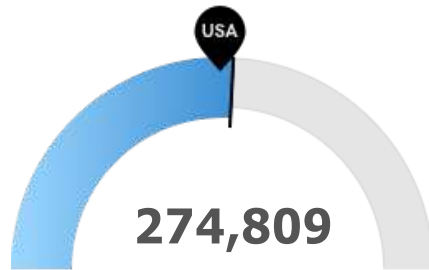
Timeframe	Unemployment Rate
2020	9.16%
2021	5.37%
2022	3.78%
2023	3.60%
2024	4.13%
January 2025	4.83%
February 2025	5.16%
March 2025	5.14%
April 2025	4.75%

Population Characteristics



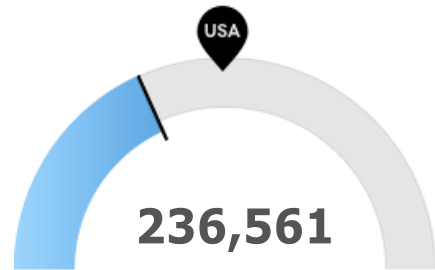
Millennials

Worcester County, MA has 171,490 millennials (ages 25-39). The national average for an area this size is 176,133.



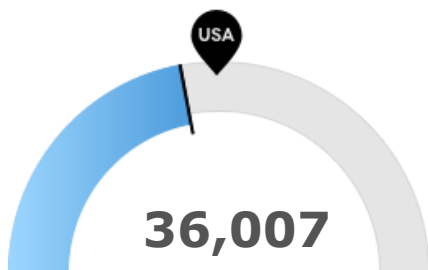
Retiring Soon

Retirement risk is about average in Worcester County, MA. The national average for an area this size is 261,686 people 55 or older, while there are 274,809 here.



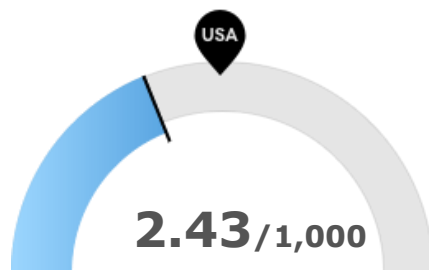
Racial Diversity

Racial diversity is low in Worcester County, MA. The national average for an area this size is 361,024 racially diverse people, while there are 236,561 here.



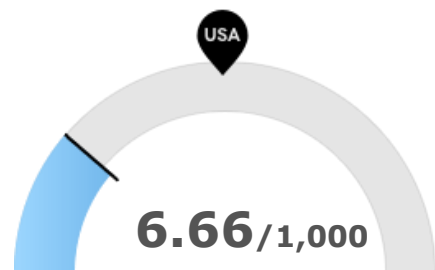
Veterans

Worcester County, MA has 36,007 veterans. The national average for an area this size is 42,886.



Violent Crime

Worcester County, MA has 2.43 violent crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 3.54 per 1,000 people.

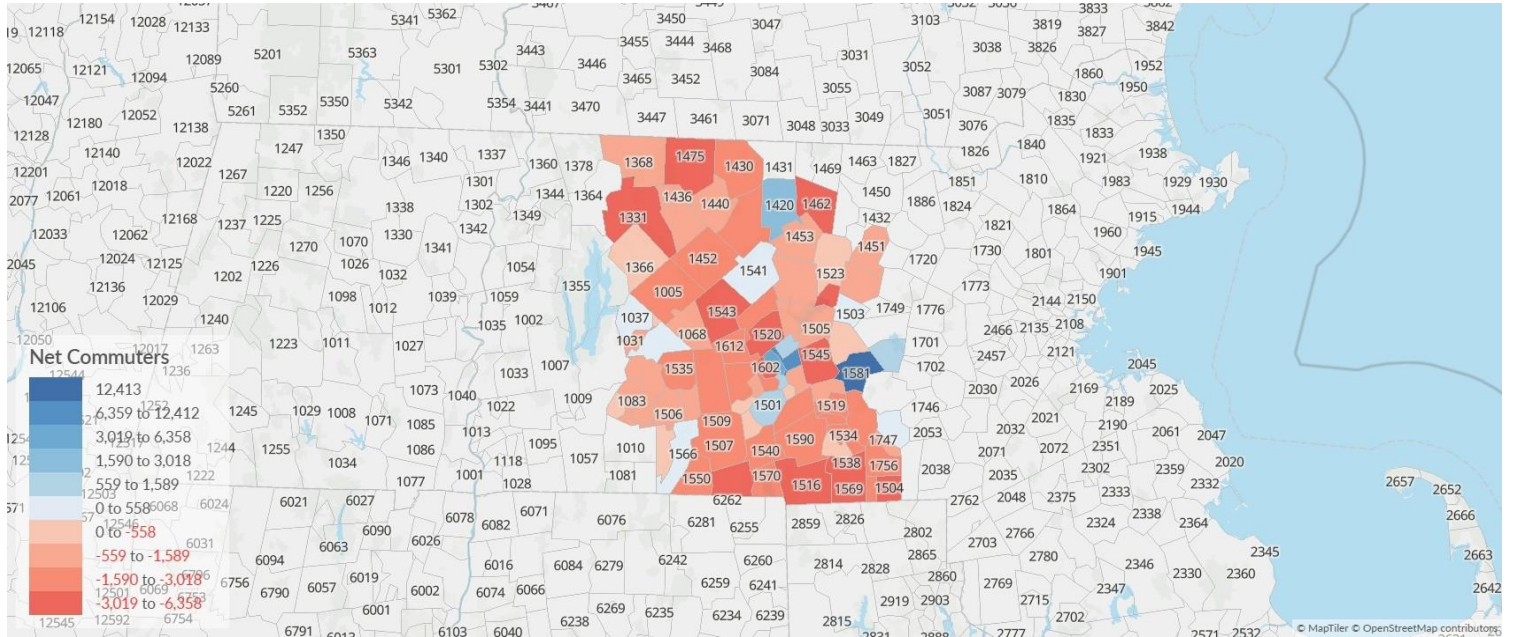


Property Crime

Worcester County, MA has 6.66 property crimes per 1,000 people. The national rate is 18.02 per 1,000 people.

Place of Work vs Place of Residence

Understanding where talent in Worcester County, MA currently works compared to where talent lives can help you optimize site decisions.



Where Talent Works

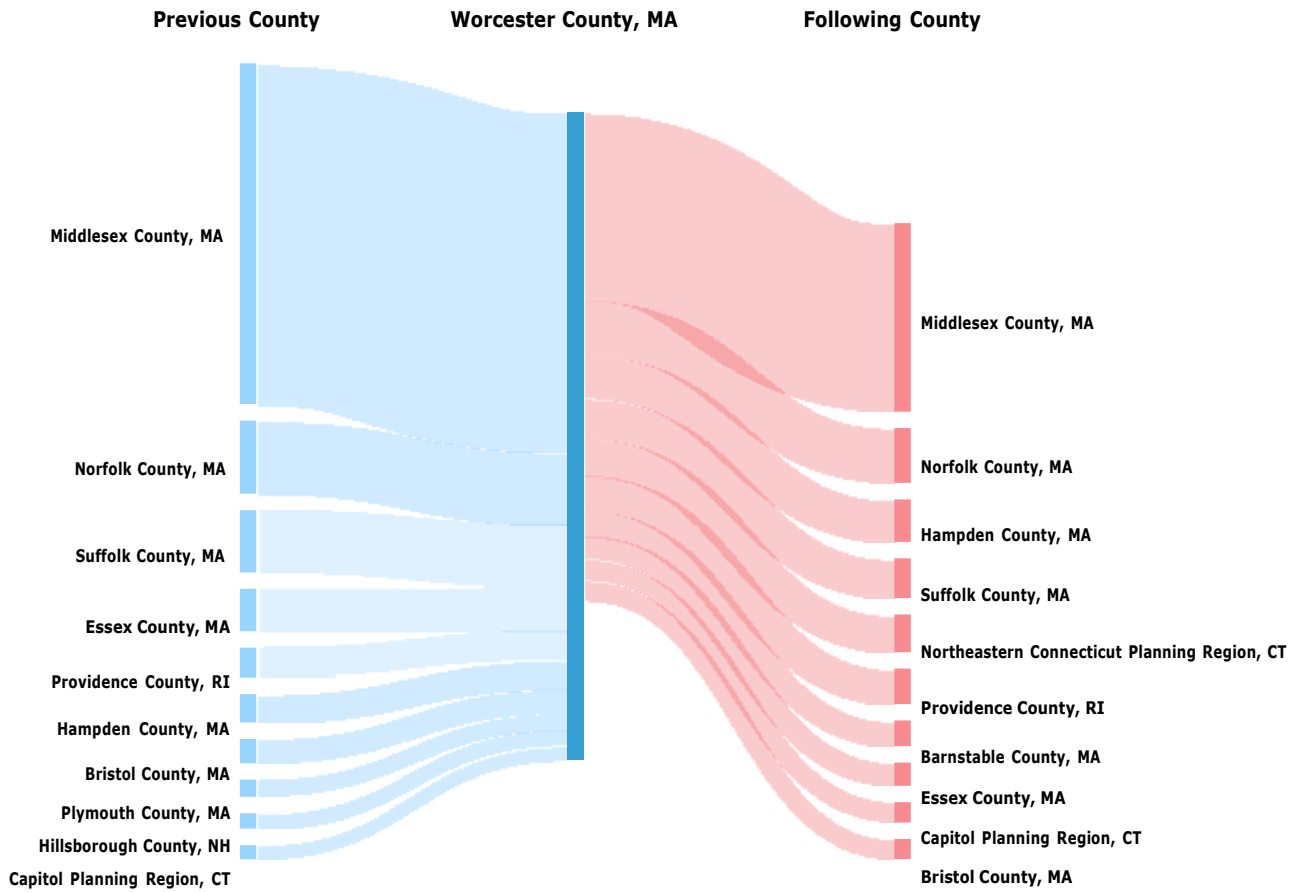
Where Talent Lives

ZIP	Name	2024 Employment	ZIP	Name	2024 Workers
1420	Fitchburg, MA (in Wor...	25,112	1420	Fitchburg, MA (in Wor...	23,488
1581	Westborough, MA (in W...	23,431	1453	Leominster, MA (in Wo...	23,244
1453	Leominster, MA (in Wo...	22,442	1545	Shrewsbury, MA (in Wo...	19,512
1605	Worcester, MA (in Wor...	18,294	1604	Worcester, MA (in Wor...	18,549
1604	Worcester, MA (in Wor...	17,643	1757	Milford, MA (in Worces...	16,930

Inbound and Outbound Migration

The table below analyzes past and current residents of Worcester County, MA. The left column shows residents of other counties migrating to Worcester County, MA. The right column shows residents migrating from Worcester County, MA to other counties.

As of 2022, **7,565** people have migrated from Middlesex County, MA to Worcester County, MA. In the same year, **4,185** people left Worcester County, MA migrating to Middlesex County, MA. The total Net Migration for Worcester County, MA in 2022 was **-1,428**.



Top Previous Counties

Migrations

Middlesex County, MA

7,565

Norfolk County, MA

1,623

Top Previous Counties	Migrations
Suffolk County, MA	1,384
Essex County, MA	940
Providence County, RI	665
Hampden County, MA	630
Bristol County, MA	540
Plymouth County, MA	381
Hillsborough County, NH	341
Capitol Planning Region, CT	314
Hampshire County, MA	285
Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region, CT	269
Franklin County, MA	266
Barnstable County, MA	217
Bronx County, NY	134

Top Following Counties	Migrations
Middlesex County, MA	4,185
Norfolk County, MA	1,217
Hampden County, MA	944
Suffolk County, MA	882
Northeastern Connecticut Planning Region, CT	835
Providence County, RI	787
Barnstable County, MA	570
Essex County, MA	513
Capitol Planning Region, CT	451
Bristol County, MA	447
Hillsborough County, NH	412
Hampshire County, MA	382
Franklin County, MA	378

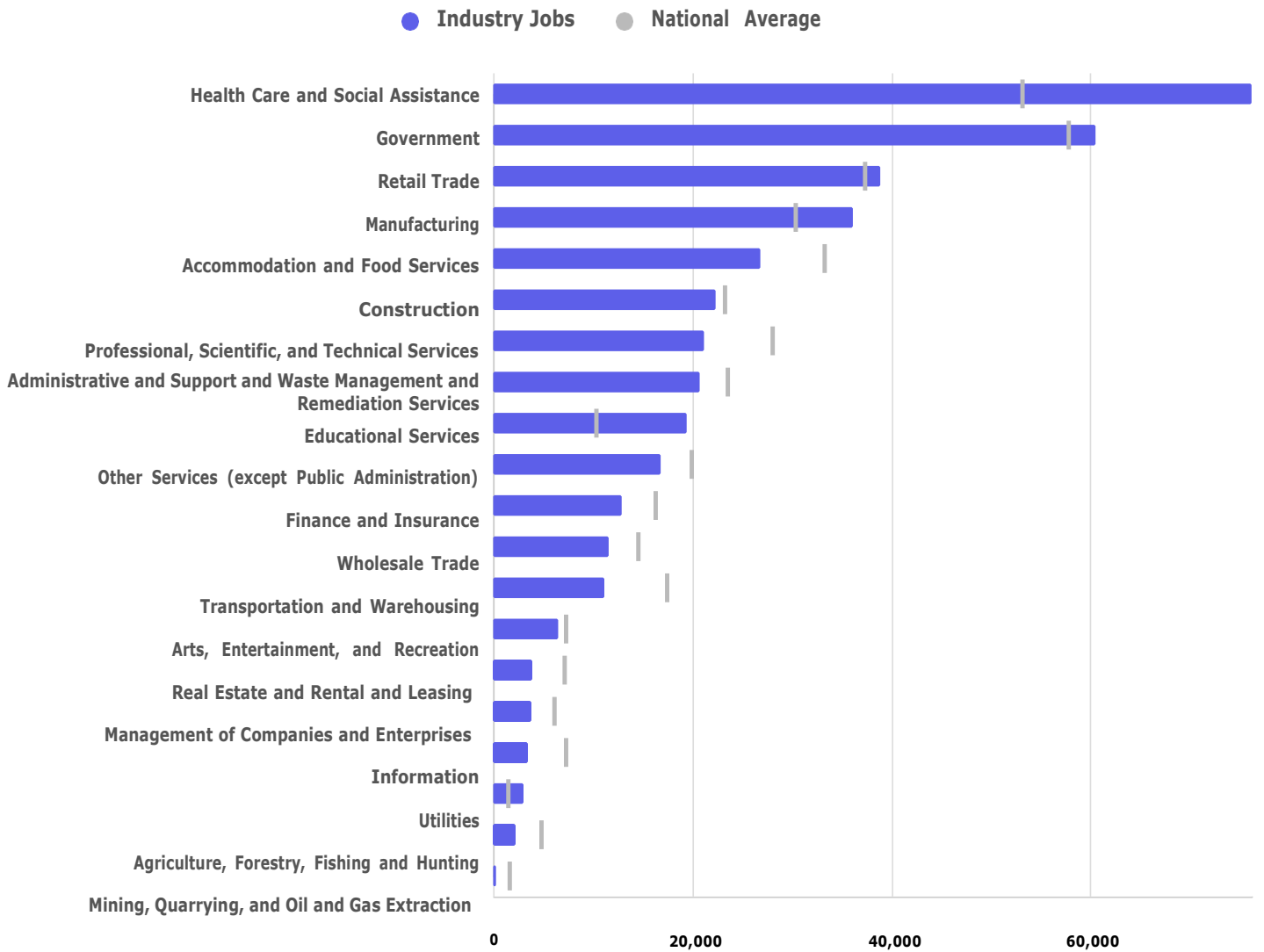
Top Following Counties**Migrations**

Plymouth County, MA**357**

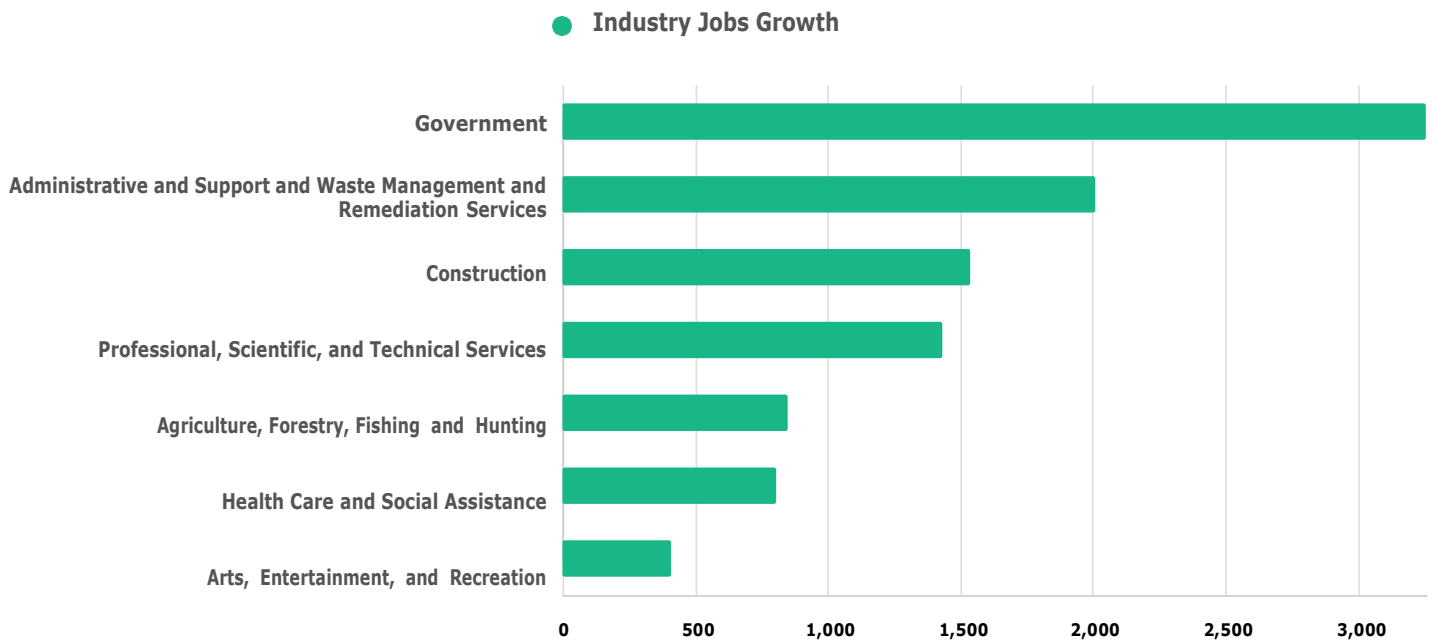
Cheshire County, NH**300**

Industry Characteristics

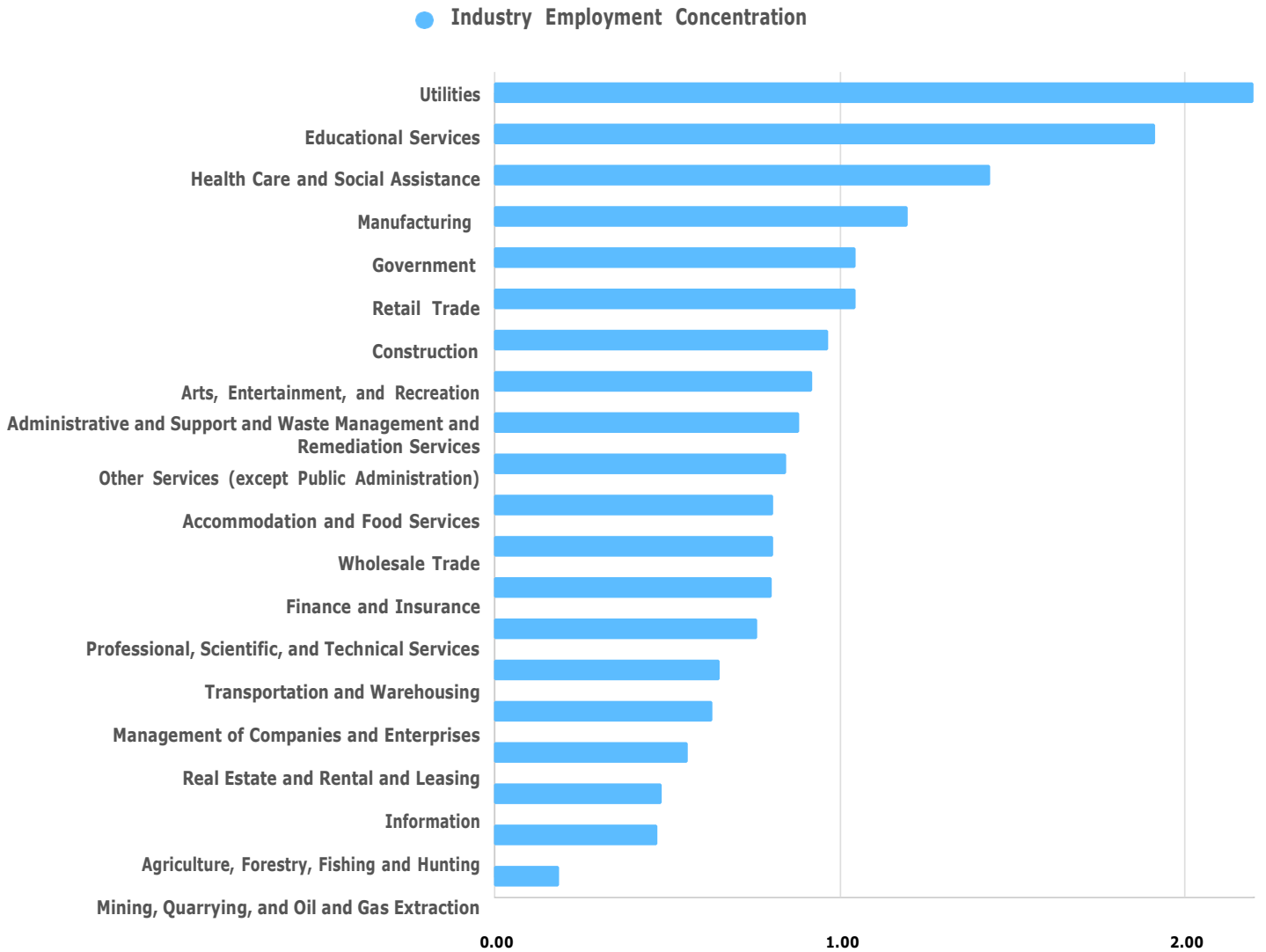
Largest Industries



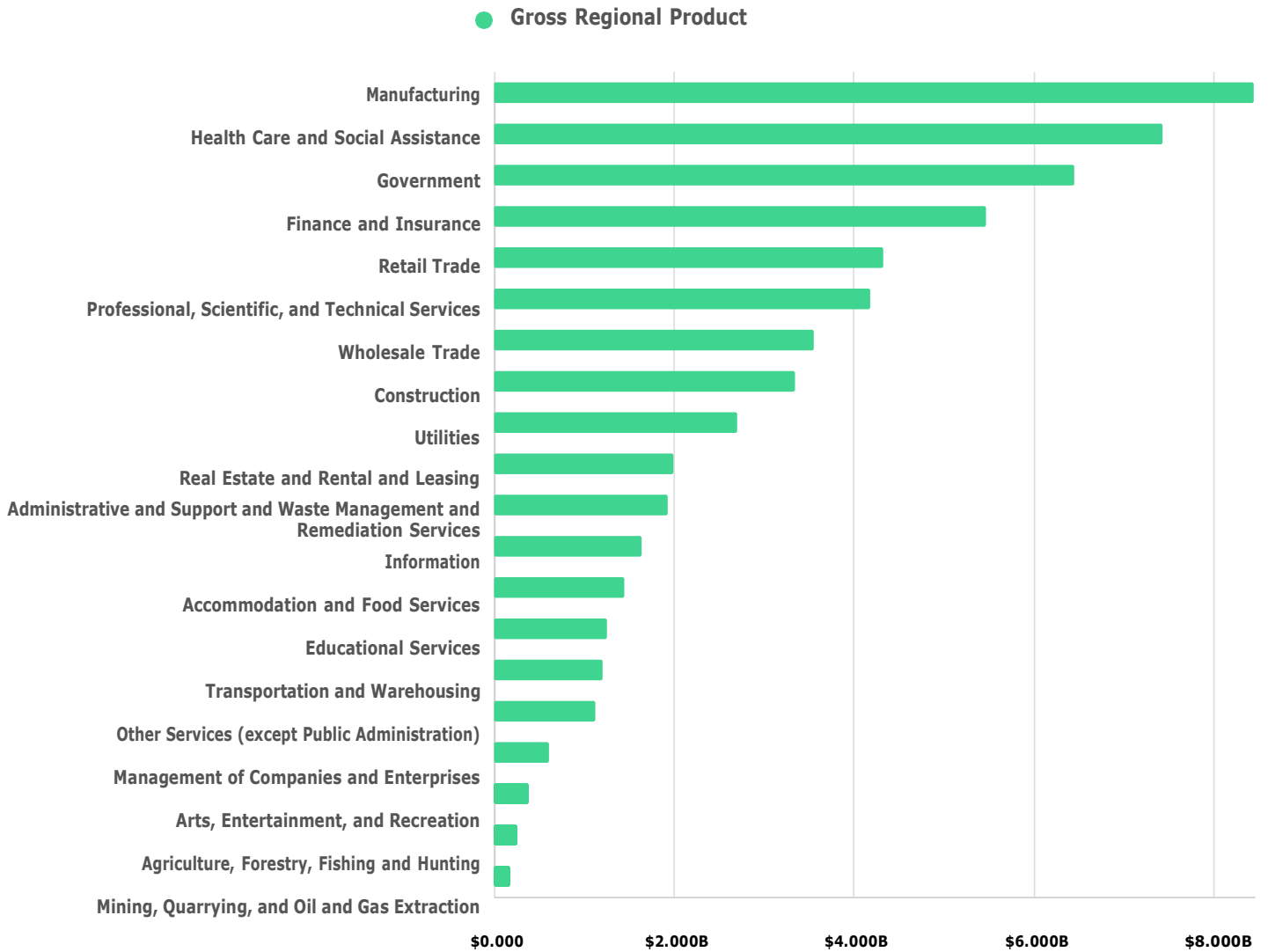
Top Growing Industries



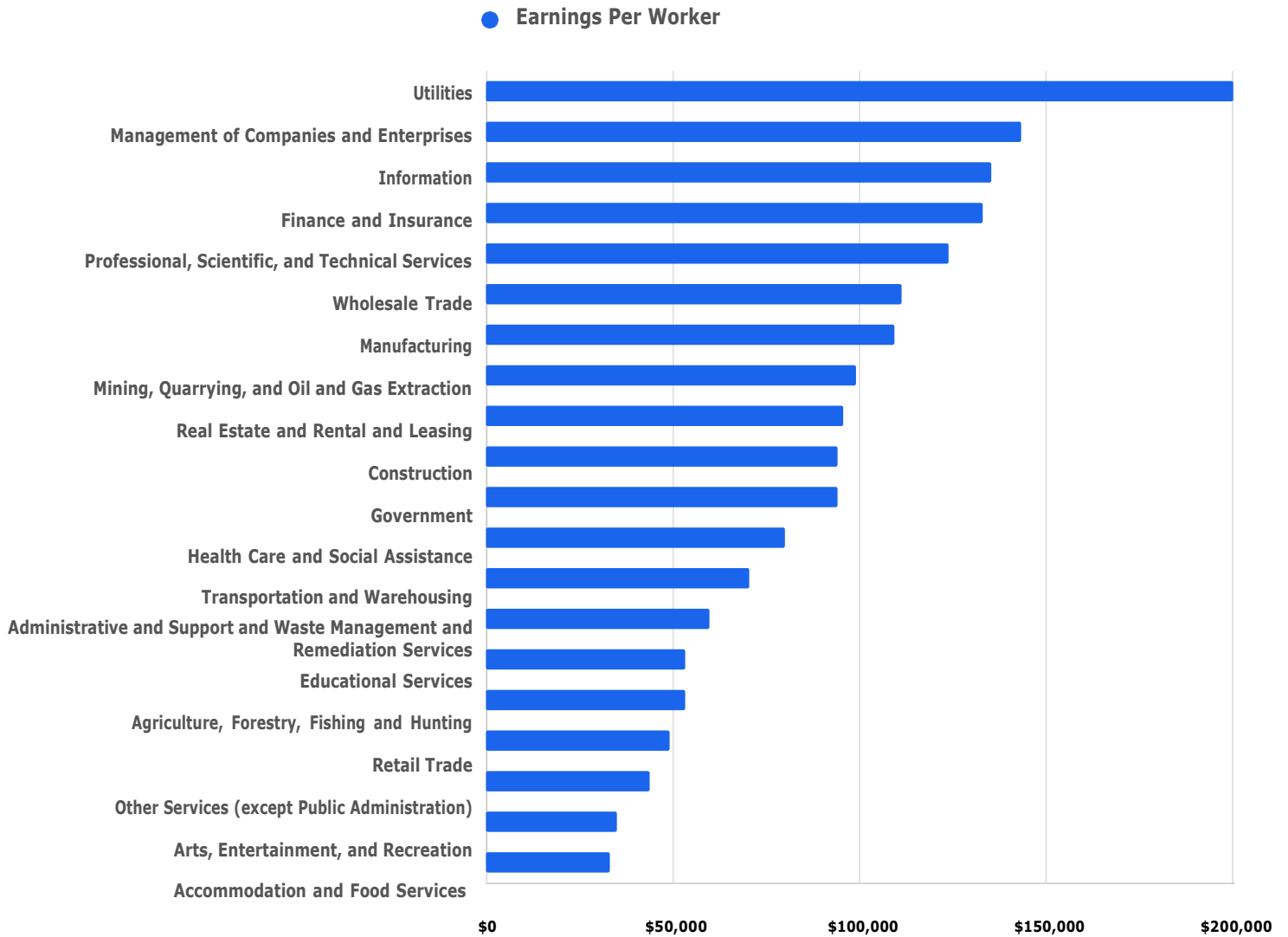
Top Industry Employment Concentration



Top Industry GRP























Top Industry Earnings



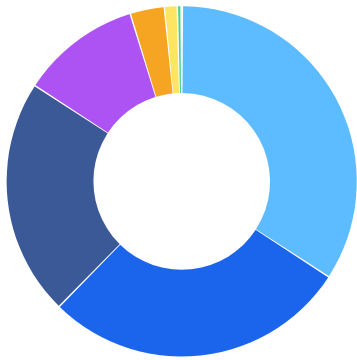
Business Characteristics

47,836 Companies Employ Your Workers

Online profiles for your workers mention 47,836 companies as employers, with the top 10 appearing below. In the last 12 months, 7,317 companies in Worcester County, MA posted job postings, with the top 10 appearing below.

Top Companies	Profiles	Top Companies Posting	Unique Postings
UMass Memorial Health	6,089 	UMass Memorial Health	3,808 
University of Massachusetts	3,142 	Amazon	1,429 
Dell Technologies	1,974 	Saint Vincent Hospital	1,043 
Worcester Polytechnic Institute	1,492 	Optum	757 
Worcester Public Schools	1,301 	Walmart	710 
Hanover Insurance Group	1,275 	Mount Wachusett Community C...	633 
Commonwealth of Massachuse...	1,184 	Soliant Health	576 
TJX	1,058 	State of Massachusetts	575 
Fidelity Investments	974 	UnitedHealth Group	562 
Clark University	949 	Milford Regional Medical Center	540 

Business Size

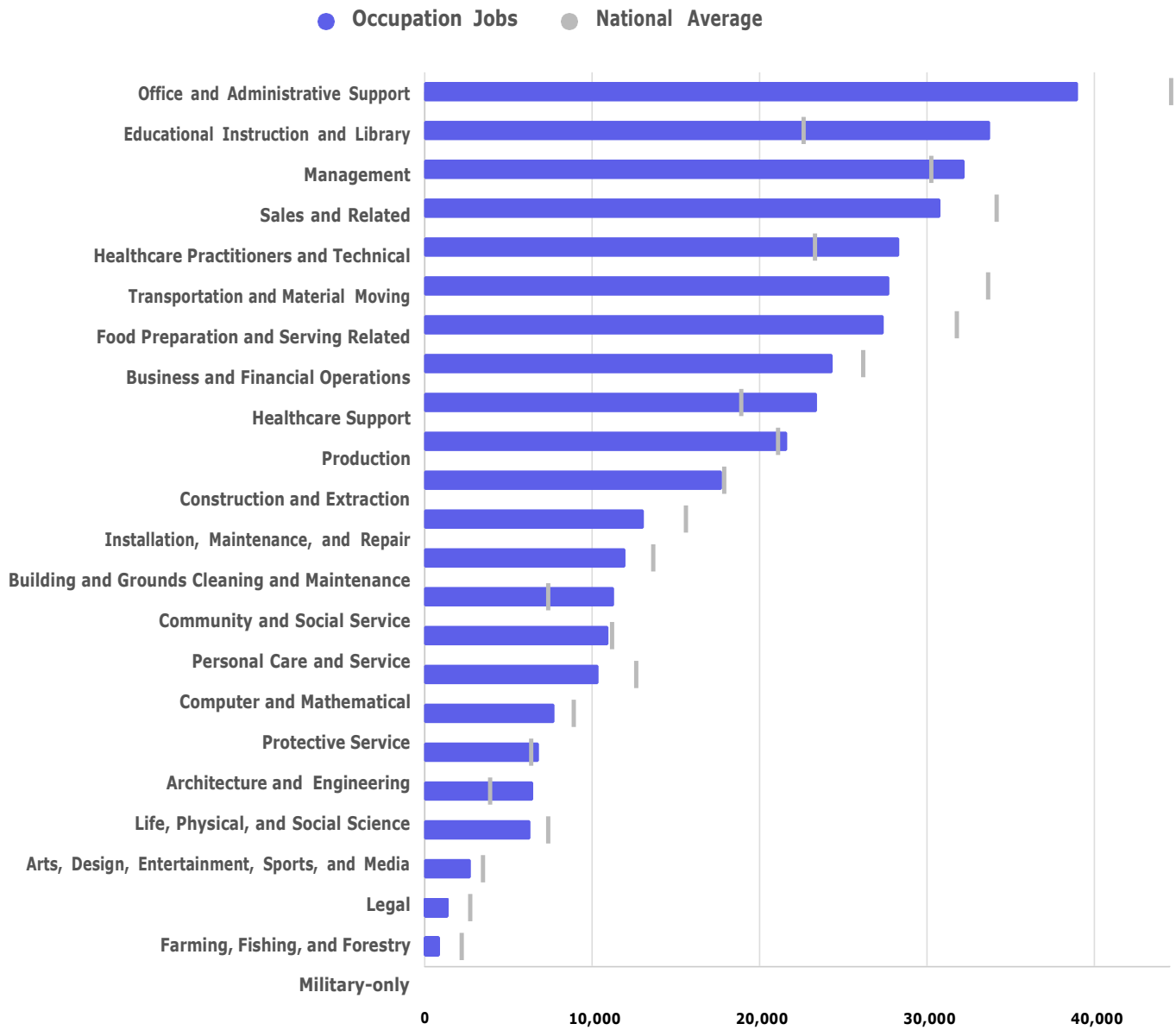


	Percentage	Business Count
● 1 to 4 employees	34.1%	12,226
● 5 to 9 employees	28.2%	10,099
● 10 to 19 employees	21.9%	7,837
● 20 to 49 employees	11.1%	3,968
● 50 to 99 employees	3.2%	1,132
● 100 to 249 employees	1.2%	426
● 250 to 499 employees	0.3%	122
● 500+ employees	0.1%	47

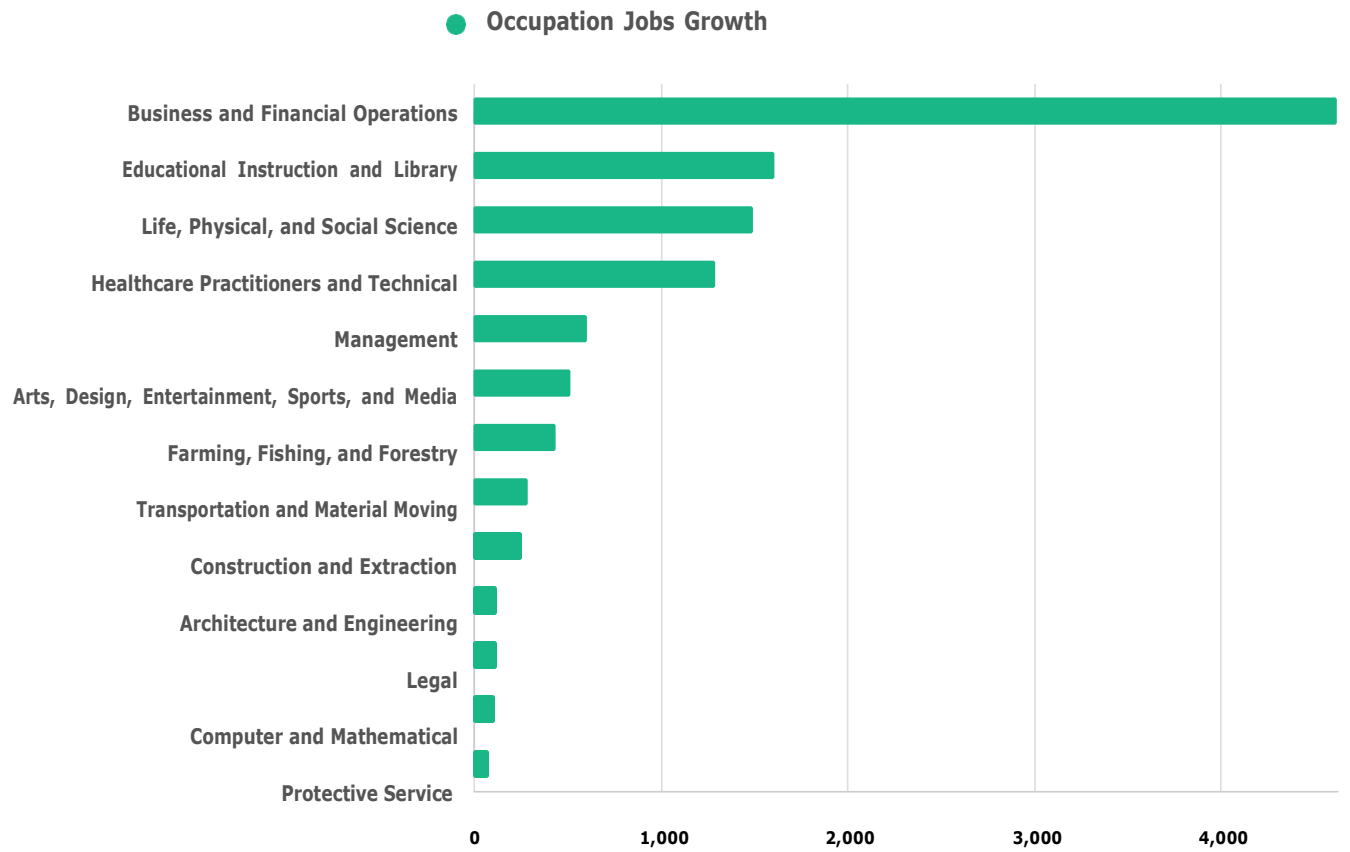
*Business Data by DatabaseUSA.com is third-party data provided by Lightcast to its customers as a convenience, and Lightcast does not endorse or warrant its accuracy or consistency with other published Lightcast data. In most cases, the Business Count will not match total companies with profiles on the summary tab.

Workforce Characteristics

Largest Occupations

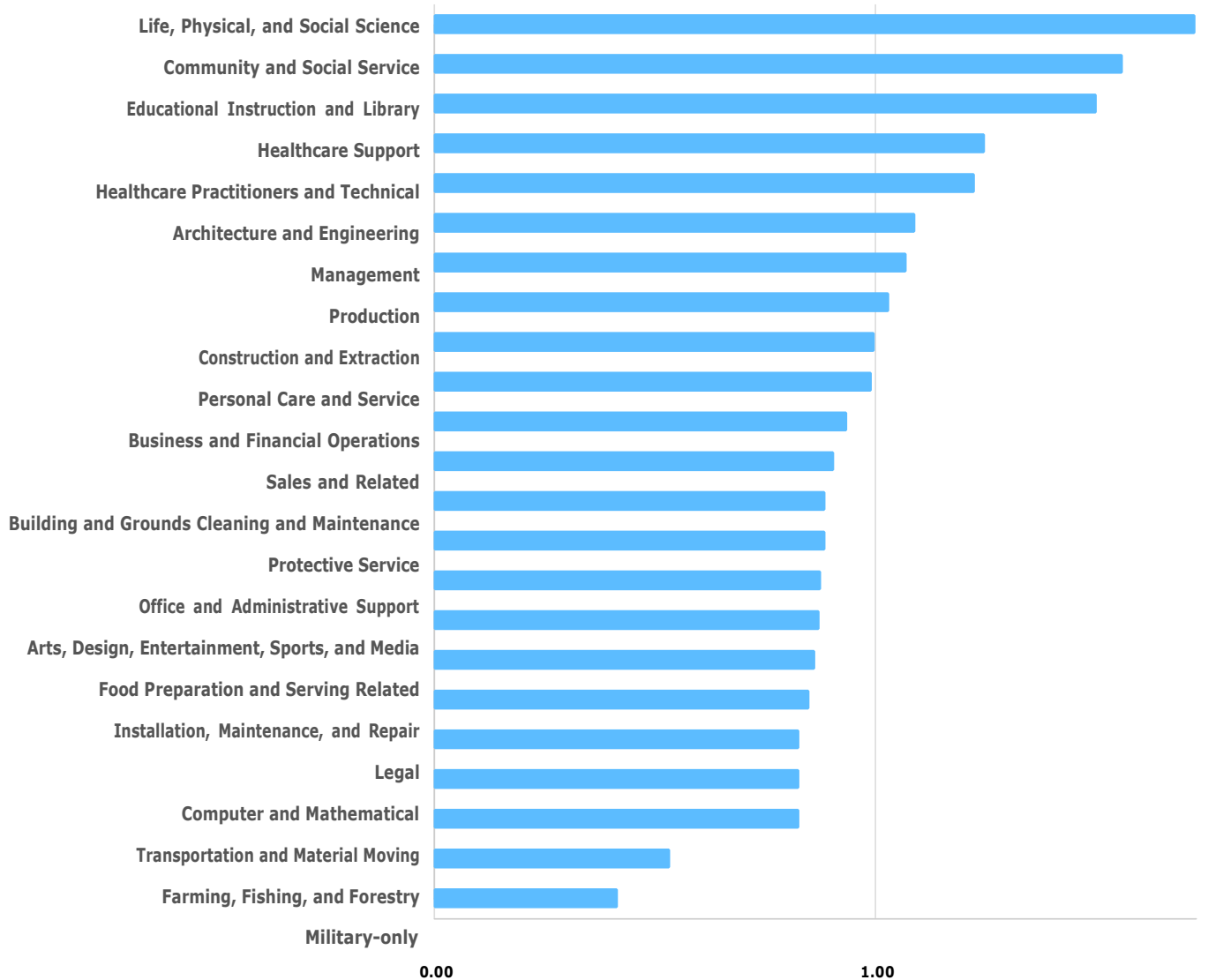


Top Growing Occupations

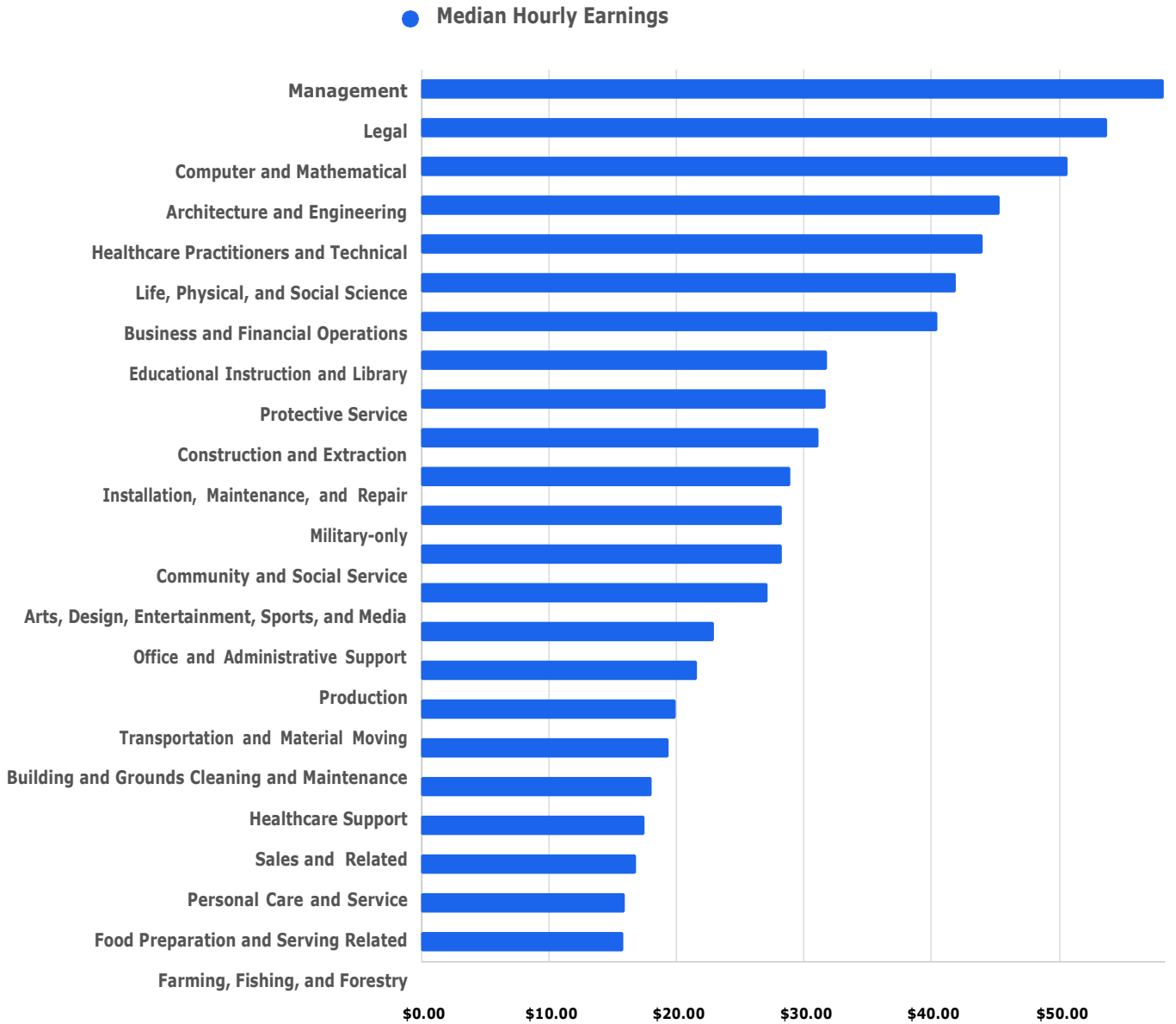


Top Occupation Employment Concentration

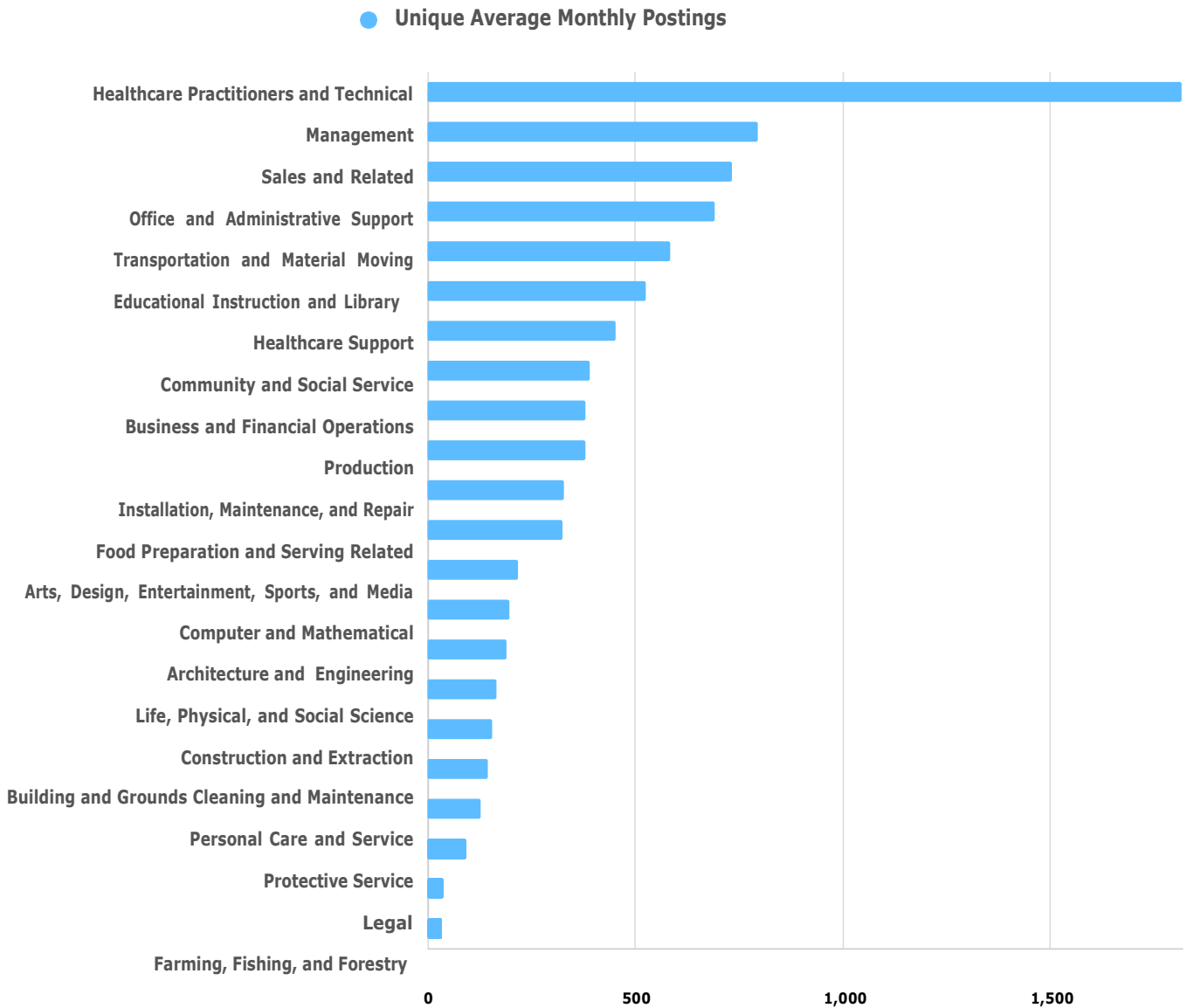
● Occupation Employment Concentration



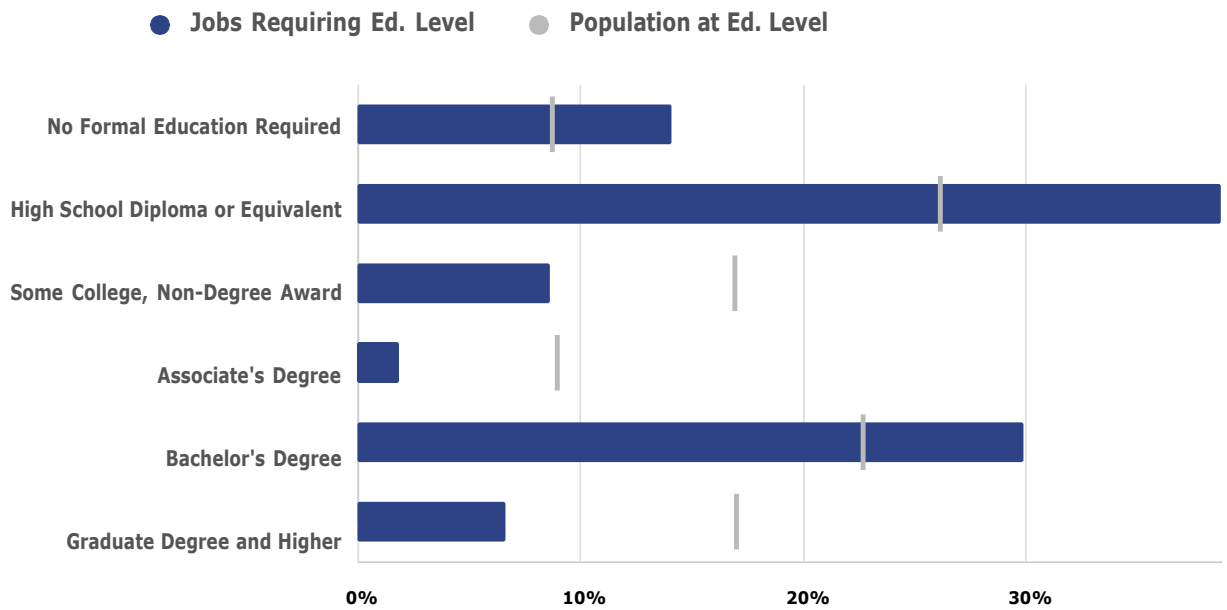
Top Occupation Earnings



Top Posted Occupations

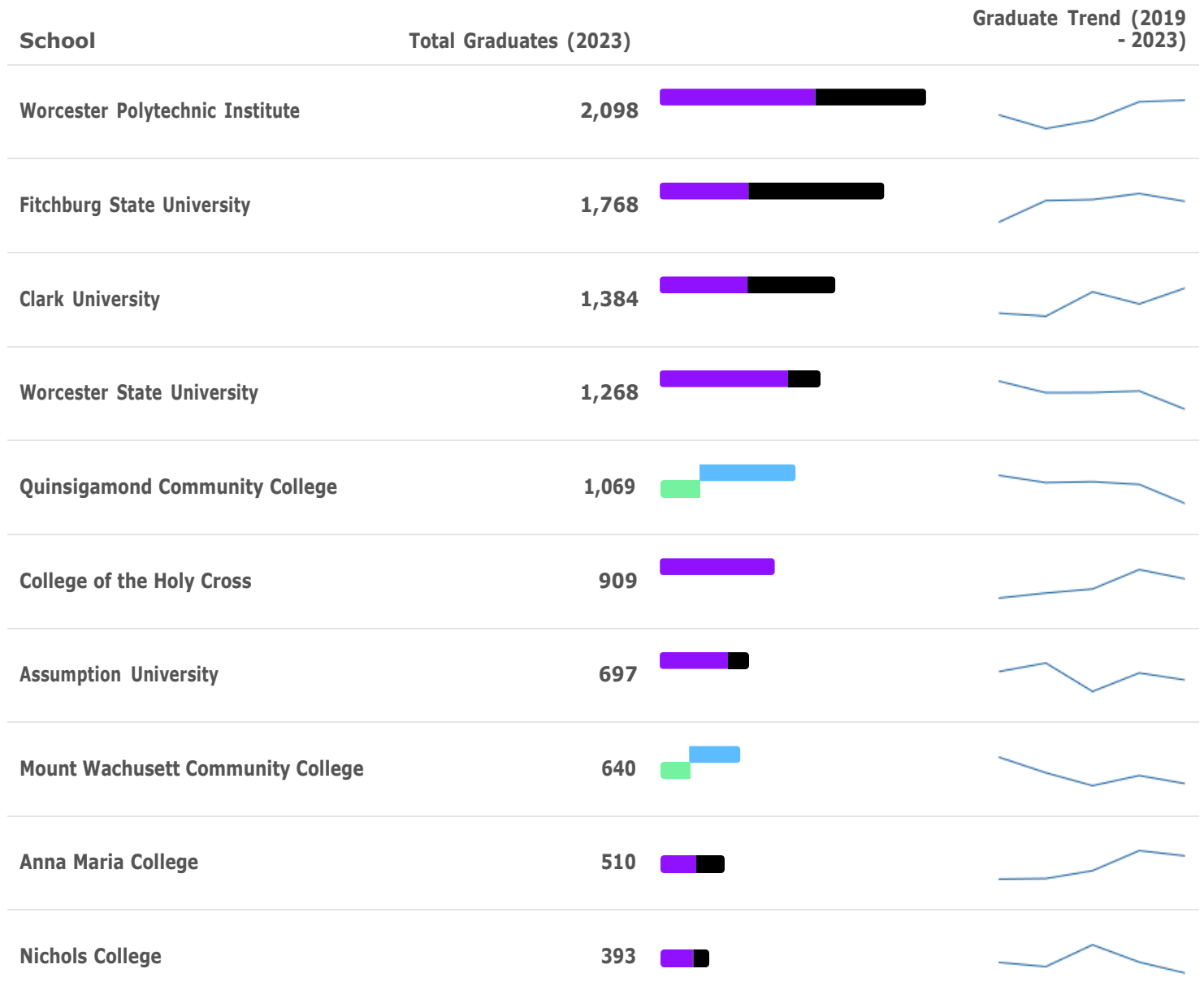


Underemployment



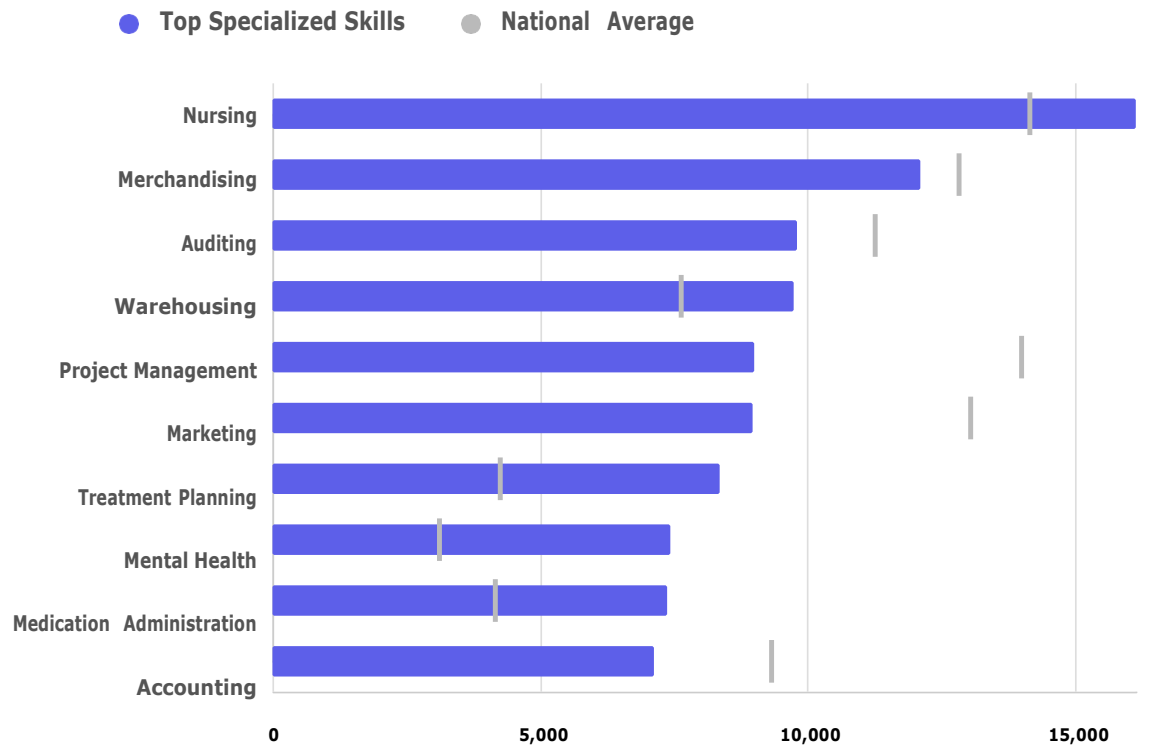
Educational Pipeline

In 2023, there were 11,612 graduates in Worcester County, MA. This pipeline has shrunk by 2% over the last 5 years. The highest share of these graduates come from "Business Administration and Management, General" (Master's or Higher), "Psychology, General" (Bachelor's), and "Business Administration and Management, General" (Bachelor's).



● Certificate
 ● Associate's
 ● Bachelor's
 ● Master's or Higher

In-Demand Skills



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
FOR THE
CENTRAL MA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREA
BETWEEN THE
MASSHIRE CENTRAL REGION WORKFORCE BOARD AND ITS WORKFORCE INNOVATION
AND OPPORTUNITY ACT PARTNERS

I. PURPOSE

This Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) communicates the agreement developed and executed between the MassHire Central Region Workforce Board (MCRWB), with agreement of the City Manager, City of Worcester, serving as the region’s Chief Elected Official (CEO), the One-Stop Career Center (OSCC) services provider (aka, the MassHire Central Career Centers (MCCC)), and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Partners (herein referred to as “Partners”), relating to the operation of the OSCC delivery of service in the Central MA Workforce Development Area (WDA).

The MCRWB will act as the convener of MOU negotiations and together with the Partners will shape how local OSCC services are delivered.

This MOU defines the roles and responsibilities of the MOU parties in operationalizing the delivery of services and other activities to produce the best possible outcomes for shared customers, including youth, job seekers and businesses, consistent with all Partner program authorizing statutes and regulations.

For purposes of this MOU, shared customers are defined as youth, job seekers, and businesses that are eligible for and receive services from more than one WIOA Partner program. Shared customers benefit from services and resources delivered across multiple WIOA Partner programs and other stakeholders that are aligned to meet an individual’s needs. Shared customers also meet the definition in the Title II regulations of WIOA, 34 CFR Section 463.3, of “concurrent enrollment or co-enrollment refers to enrollment by an eligible individual in two or more of the six core programs administered under the Act.” (Programs and Activities Authorized by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II of the WIOA).)

II. CENTRAL MA WIOA PARTNERS

In accordance with WIOA Section 121(c), this Local Memorandum of Understanding has been developed and executed with agreement of the region’s CEO and the WIOA OSCC required partners mandated in 20 CFR Section 678.400 (See Attachment A for regional partner contact list).

The required OSCC partners are:

1. **The Adult Program** (Title I), as part of the Department of Career Services (DCS), Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD);
2. **The Dislocated Worker Program** (Title I), as part of DCS/EOLWD;
3. **The Youth Program** (Title I), as part of the MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS), EOLWD, programs authorized under Title I, including: Job Corps, YouthBuild, Native American programs, and Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers programs;
4. **The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program** (Title II), as part of Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) Executive Office of Education (EOE); represented by the Worcester Public Schools, the Webster Public Schools, Training Resources of America, and Ascentria Community Services, Inc., Quinsigamond Community College, Sheriff's Department of Worcester, and Catholic Charities.
5. **The Wagner-Peyser Act Program** (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III), as part of DCS, EOLWD; represented through the region's OSCC services provider, MCCC;
6. **The Vocational Rehabilitation Program** (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV), as part of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS);
7. **Federal-state unemployment compensation program**, as part of the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA), EOLWD;
8. **Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs** (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.)), as part of DCS, EOLWD;
9. **Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program** (Programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.) as part of DCS, EOLWD;
10. **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program** (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) as part of Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), EOHHS;
11. **Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**, (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)), as part of DTA, EOHHS;
12. **Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)** (Programs authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))
13. **Ex-Offender Program (Sec. 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007)**: Sheriff's Department of Worcester.

Non-required community partners in this local MOU are:

14. The Worcester Community Action Council, the federally-designated anti-poverty agency for Worcester and 45 neighboring communities;

Additional parties may be added to this MOU.

III. DURATION

WIOA Section 121(c) (g) requires that the MOU shall be reviewed not less than once in every 3-year period to ensure appropriate funding and effective delivery of services, and physical and programmatic accessibility. WIOA Regulations Subpart C 20 CFR Part 678.500 further requires MOU renewal following the 3-year review if substantial changes have occurred.

This agreement shall commence on July 1, 2024, and shall terminate on June 30, 2027, unless otherwise terminated by an individual Partner with 30-days written notice to all Partners, by agreement of all parties, or superseded.

IV. ASSURANCES

The MCRWB and the Partners agree to conduct the following activities at a local level:

1. Enter into a local MOU with the MassHire Workforce Board relating to operation of the MassHire Career Center delivery system.
2. Participate in the operation of the MassHire Career Center delivery system consistent with the terms of this MOU, the requirements of WIOA, and the requirements of Federal laws authorizing the programs and activities.
3. Agree to serve shared customers and define how multiple providers, services and resources should support youth, job seekers, and businesses.
4. Utilize the MassHire Career Center Customer Flow and incorporate partner agency points of referral whether in-person or virtual to ensure accessibility and availability of programs and services for shared customers.
5. Ensure the effective use of modern tools and technology that enable shared customers to access needed services to complete program participation and achieve training and employment goals.
6. Develop a process for Partner communication, referrals, enrollment, and sharing outcome information on shared customers to staff, and develop a process to review data on shared customers.
7. Use a portion of the funds available for programs and activities to maintain the MassHire Career Center delivery system, including infrastructure and shared costs of MassHire Career Centers, through methods agreed upon by the Local Board, Chief Elected Official, and Partners. If no consensus on methods is reached, the Governor, after consultation with the Chief Elected Official, Local Board, and State Board shall determine the portion of funds to be provided (WIOA sec. 121(a) (h) (1) (C)).
8. Provide representation on the Local Workforce Boards to the extent possible and/or participate in

Local Board ad hoc activities/events or on standing committees.

9. Convene locally as an MOU Team at least quarterly and agree to the roles and responsibilities each Partner will have in the development of a diversity, equitable, and inclusive integrated service delivery strategy that meets the needs of customers and businesses.
10. The MOU will be reviewed, and if substantial changes have occurred, renewed, not less than once every 3-year period to ensure appropriate funding and delivery of services. The MOU must be updated to reflect any change in the MHCC Partner infrastructure cost contributions.

V. MOU CONTENT (DEVELOPMENT, PRIORITY POPULATIONS, AND SHARED SERVICES)

1. This MOU was initially developed through a joint task force consisting of Partner representatives from within the Central MA WDA. These staff have come together to form the region's WIOA Partner Leadership Council (see Attachment B: Central MA WIOA Partnership Structure).
2. The following regional populations are prioritized by the Partners for receipt of shared services:
 - a. Unemployment insurance claimants;
 - b. Low-income adults, including TANF and SNAP recipients;
 - c. Individuals experiencing Homelessness;
 - d. Adult Education participants (Title II);
 - e. Individuals with disabilities (Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV);
 - f. Veterans;
 - g. Older workers (Title V);
 - h. Re-entry populations (program authorized by the Second Chance Act);
 - i. Youth, including youth with barriers to employment and youth participating in YouthBuild and Job Corps programs; and
 - j. Migrant Seasonal Farm Workers.
3. The Central MA WDA continuum of services available for shared customers (including each priority populations) includes:
 - a. Referrals: until such time as the Commonwealth may develop an online referral process, Partners shall utilize the regional referral process guidebook to assist in the smooth referral of shared customers to Partner programs as appropriate. This regional guidebook has been developed by the Partners, be available electronically to all Partner staff, and describe:
 - o The services and activities available from each Partner program;
 - o General eligibility for each Partner program;
 - o Details regarding the steps necessary for program enrollment;
 - o A lead contact person to serve as a Partner staff liaison.
 Additionally, Partners will further work together to identify and implement new methods to increase referrals to Partners and joint service delivery, such as the use of virtual/online tools.

- b. Intake & Orientation: until such time as the Commonwealth develops an online tool to share intake and enrollment data between Partner agencies, each Partner shall utilize the intake and orientation process necessary to fulfill their program requirements. Partners shall document within their system(s) if a customer is currently receiving services from WIOA Partners, and also include introductory information regarding services and programming available through the other regional Partners when appropriate.
- c. Career Assessment: the Partners agree to share career assessment results when a referral is given.
- d. Career Planning: when making a referral, the Partners will forward any career planning information that has been developed with the customer or coordinating shared follow-up activities.
- e. Career Readiness /Training/Education: the Partners agree to review and where appropriate consolidate (combine/share) workshops/curricula. Partners will also seek to leverage each other's staff resources through cross-training of staff in workshop delivery, including online readiness tools and shall allow for priority enrollment of Partner-referred customers when offering career pathway training and education, to the maximum extent possible under program requirements and logistical or time constraints.
- f. Job Search Assistance: the Partners agree to coordinate shared customer job search activities through joint case-management efforts when practical and offer customer referrals to the career center when these services are appropriate, including referrals for placement opportunities available through the career center's employment referral process.
- g. Case-management: the Partners agree to coordinate services for high-need/high risk shared customers through regular contact with each other. These contacts may be via phone, email or in-person and utilize electronic tools as appropriate to manage and document their efforts. The region's WIOA Partner staff will further connect through quarterly networking opportunities.
- h. Data/Performance Tracking: Subject to applicable legal constraints, including but not necessarily limited to those contained in G. L. 151A and 20 CFR Part 603, the parties of this MOU agree to seek increased sharing of data with a view to improving the quality of service-delivery to both job-seekers and business-customers. The Party whose data is requested to be shared shall be the judge, in its sole discretion, of the legal constraints governing whether and how its data may be shared. The parties of this MOU understand that a shared data system is being designed at the state level and will fully support the development and implementation of a state-level data system, subject to the foregoing limitations.

The Central MA WDA WIOA Partnership services delivery model map for priority populations can be found in Attachment C.

- 4. A description of the continuum of services available for business customers in the Central MA WDA may be found in Attachment D, which also includes information regarding the flow of business services and the labor-matching process used at the career centers, and business customer feedback shall be utilized by the career center. Partners that interact with businesses are able to identify

demand-driven career pathway programming needs and assist with the development and coordination of responses to these identified employer needs (see Attachment E: Central MA Demand Driven Development Chart).

5. The Partners collectively recognize the pain and disparities caused by systemic racism and other institutional sources of inequality and pledge to advance the principles of greater access to programmatic resources, as well as inclusion of our diverse WDA's residents when forming policy and planning programming. We commit to addressing structural barriers to equality and to professional development regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.
6. The Central MA WDA WIOA Partnership services delivery continuum charts for priority populations is found in Attachment F. These charts include information regarding access to technology and materials available through the region's OSCC, for each of the above priority populations in the region. Furthermore, Partners agree to share technology-based tools wherever practical and allowable to support delivery of items a-h above to shared customers with career center membership, including the use of tools, such as MA JobQuest, TORQ, and the online resume builder by the career center and Partner staff. See Virtual Customer Flow chart (Attachment G).
7. When necessary and appropriate, the Partners will work to develop and implement service delivery for shared customers outside of regular hours of operation (e.g. evenings and weekends), including virtual services made available online.
8. The Partners agree to support the work of the MCRWB and regional career centers in building skilled worker pipelines for priority and critical industries identified in the Central Region Workforce Blueprint (see Attachment H) to the extent possible, including assistance with project development, recruitment, and case-management.
9. As part of the region's ongoing effort to improve coordination and effectiveness of services, the Partners shall work together to develop and deliver coordinated staff development and training, including training on topics such as:
 - System integration: Partner program benefits/services/eligibility, MassHire BizWorks, performance data tracking, customer referral process, online services use
 - Professional growth: time management, case-notes,
 - Specific interest: cultural competence, disability tools and supports, language resources
 A Professional Development Staff Group may be established to coordinate these trainings and identify additional topics as appropriate to support continuous improvement, including equity and inclusion.
10. Partners agree to assist with the development and implementation of a joint regional WIOA Partner marketing and outreach efforts to promote programs and services for jobseekers, youth and businesses.

11. The Partners agree that they will support the ongoing effort to create an effective cross-Partner staff networking group and to assist with the recognition and celebration of staff, Partner and customer success, including nominating teams and individuals for the MassHire Awards.
12. All required WIOA Partners will work in good faith locally and with state officials from each of the Partner agencies as necessary to fund joint costs in a manner that satisfies the requirements of section 121(h) of WIOA for purposes of funding the one-stop system. Partners agree to therefore work together to develop the formula for distribution of shared and infrastructure funding based upon local data for each of the 16 workforce areas. Inter-Agency Service Agreements have been executed with MassHire Department of Career Services, who is the State Workforce Agency (SWA), and each required WIOA State Partner to utilize the current integrated budget format to show in-kind and shared costs, including infrastructure costs as a method to record joint costs. Notwithstanding the above, the City of Worcester is not required to contribute funding beyond amounts received from federal, state or private sources. A general framework of this funding, including use of programmatic, administrative, and in-kind costs can be found in Attachment I: Central Region WIOA Partner Resource Sharing Matrix.
13. The Partners agree to negotiate with WIOA Required Partners locally when state level infrastructure agreements are not in place.

VI. COMPETITIVE SELECTION OF ONE STOP CAREER CENTERS

Required WIOA Partners agree to participate in the selection process of the MassHire Central region WIOA Operator as required by WIOA and coordinated by the MCRWB, at least once every four years.

VII. PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The MCRWB, in agreement with the required WIOA Partners, agree to jointly review the WIOA mandated performance metrics for the workforce area and/or metrics as negotiated as part of any shared services and infrastructure contract costs between the MCRWB and the mandated Partner, including potential incentives and penalties.

VIII. SIGNATORIES

By signing this agreement, all parties agree to the provisions contained herein are subject to all applicable, Federal, State, and local laws, regulations and/or guidelines relating to nondiscrimination, equal opportunity, displacement, privacy rights of participants, and maintenance of data and other confidential information relating to OSCC customers.

This MOU may be executed in counterparts, and when each party has signed and delivered at least one such counterpart, each counterpart shall be deemed an original, and, when taken together with other signed counterparts, shall constitute one MOU, which shall be binding upon and effective as to all parties.

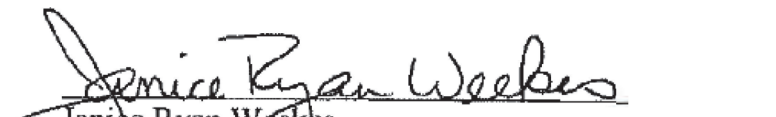

By signatures affixed below, the parties specify their agreement:



Eric D. Batista
City of Worcester (Chief Elected Official)



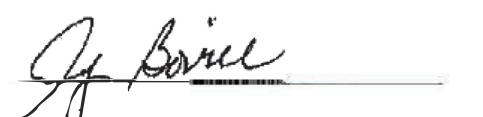
Paul Gilbody
MassHire Central Region Workforce Board


Jeffrey T. Turgeon
Central MA WIB Executive Director
Janice Ryan Weekes
Workforce Central Career Center (Service Provider)
Daniel Knapik, President/CEO
New England Farm Workers' Council

Wendy Savary
Wendy Savary
MA Department of Unemployment Assistance


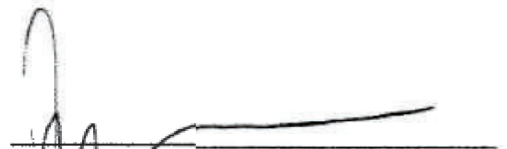

Mervyn Hamilton Campbell
Mervyn Campbell
MA Commission for the Blind

Amy Partelow
Amy Partelow
Jack Houliker
MA Rehabilitation Commission


Angela Bovill
Ascentria Community Services, Inc.

Joyce Clemence
Joyce Clemence
MA Department of Transitional Assistance

Olga Yulikova 12-2-2024
Olga Yulikova
Executive Office of Elder Affairs


Crystal Eldreth
Catholic Charities
Jennifer Brunelle
Worcester Public Schools
Nicole Trombly
Grafton Job Corps Center

Debra A LaFlash

Debra Laflash
Quinsigamond Community College



Jason W Rives
Sheriff's Department of Worcester

Deborah Baillargeon

Deborah Baillargeon
MA Department of Career Services



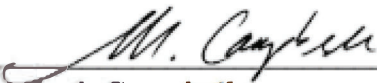
Sonia Watkins
MA Department of Career Services

Douglas Daigle

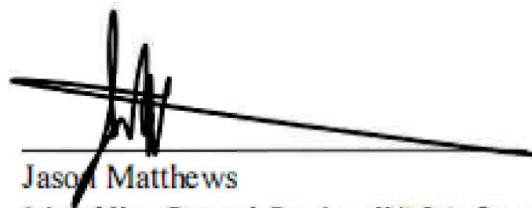
Douglas Daigle
Training Resources of America/Worcester

Ava Landry

Ava Landry
Webster Public Schools



Marybeth Campbell
Worcester Community Action Council



Jason Matthews
MassHire Central Region WIOA Operator

Signature:

Email: hflores@partnersincommunity.org

Signature: *Ava Landry*
Ava Landry (Aug 23, 2024 13:26 EDT)

Email: alandry@webster-schools.org

Signature: *Deborah Baillargeon*
Deborah Baillargeon (Oct 4, 2024 23:56 EDT)

Email: deborah.baillargeon@state.ma.us

Signature: *Douglas Daigle*
Douglas Daigle (Aug 22, 2024 11:09 EDT)

Email: ddaigle@tra-inc.org

Signature:

Email: lgobi@sdw.state.ma.us

Signature: *Mervyn Campbell*
Mervyn Campbell (Aug 22, 2024 08:47 EDT)

Email: mervyn.campbell@state.ma.us

Signature: *Wendy Savary*
Wendy Savary (Aug 23, 2024 14:38 EDT)

Email: wendy.savary@state.ma.us

Signature:

Email: mhennessy@ccworc.org

Signature: *SAPC*

Email: amy.partelow@state.ma.us

Signature:

Email: chixson@wcac.net

Signature: *Debra LaFlash*

Email: dlaflash@qcc.mass.edu

Signature:

Email: brunellejb@worcesterschools.net

Signature:

Email: lori.jacques@state.ma.us

Signature:

Email: trombly.nicole@jobcorps.org

Signature:

Email: dbassett@operationable.net

Signature:

Email: jason@wioaoperator.com